BHAKTI

THE RELIGION OF LOVE

B. Bhattacharya

Religion is an empty shell without the support of a metaphysical base. Hundreds of philosophers and ecclesiastics have gone over the ages in search of an answer to the question whether or not there is a God. This sublime hypothesis is sustained by faith and devotion. Through the ages philosophers, metaphysicians and spiritualists have spent their lives in search of this Holy Grail Faith in a hypothetical Reality acceptedly known as God. Like mankind, 'God' has undergone many phases, subjected to many kinds of nature and many forms. We have grown accustomed to offer various kinds of approach, known as worship and, irrespective of plurality of forms, the central subject remains intact: God.

An African God is different from a Red Indian God; a Japanese God is different from a Moroccan God, and a Nigerian God is quite different from an Indo-Gangetic God. Human beings are subject to climatic changes, of features, forms, food and faith.

Yet talking of God and devotion, faith and rites, a core truth remains firm, and that is that the human society needs God more than God needs the human society. This is because man is born not only with an inner hunger and an inner quest, but also with an inner hunt for the satisfaction of that quest; and the quest is satisfied partially when man can bring himself inside out by dedicating his all to a pedestal which, according to him, is the last resort of his inquest. What he brings to this pedestal of his soul is devotion—or *bhakti*—the complete dedication of the *individual* to the *universal*.

This book analyses the nature of *bhakti*—a form of total dedication that ultimately helps sublimate and annihilate that ego in man which creates a yawning breach between selfishness and self-realization. *Bhakti* is a spiritual engineers' handbook, to bridge this gap and assuage that insatiable inner hunger that shadows the progress of life from the embryo to the grave. This book proposes to expose that inner hunger, find out its nature and suggest a healing touch.

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—The Author

PREFACE

The world is celebrating the 500th anniversary of the birth of the poet saint Goswami Tulsidas of India. He lived his life as an epitome of love, devotion and sacrifice merged in the service to God. He left for posterity his great work of art, the epic poem *Ramcharita-Manasa*. I thought I could not have made a better personal contribution to this world poet at his 500th birth anniversary but by writing his life, and a short treatise on the attractions and contributions of the homage of love (bhakti), along with a sketch of the life of the great saint poet.

It has taken an inordinately long time to complete it, because of my fumbling old age, and my habit of globe-trotting. Started in 1995 in India, it was continued in England, and then in Scotland, and finally it was finished in the remote Caribbean island of Trinidad, after spending some time in New York.

My inexperience with the computer did not come of much assistance; but my beloved student-friends such as Narine Lall of New York, Namdevi Sawh, Shatanand Sawh, Yatin Rampersad and Madhu (Deonarine Teeluckchan) of Trinidad have gone out of their way to finalise the preparation of the book, and to cover up my inabilities with their respective expertise. My sincere thanks to them.

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MAATA-S-TVADEEYA PADA-PANKAJA-PANKA-MADHYE
ADYAIVA-MAY-VISHATU MAANASA-RAAJAHAMSAH
PRAANA-PRAYAANA SAMAYE KAFA-VAATA-PITTAIH
KANTHAABHI-RODHANA-VIDHAU SMARANAM KUTA-S-TE

—ANON

Mother, let my Life, as a Swan, enter now for now deep in the muck collected from washings of your feet; else at the last moment when I shall be bothered with obstructions such as phlegm, breath and bile, perchance I may forget to keep you in my heart.

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PREAMBLE

I

From a pre-embryonic parental existence of what ultimately comes to be recognized as the life cycle, the one goal of the life process is the quest for improved form of existence, or living.

In other words, the quest of the individual life force runs after gaining a better life, a better living (or, if preferred, a better dying, a simpler and smoother dying), i.e., gaining happiness. Happy is he who dies happy. To die happy one has to live happy.

Life wants to be happy. Life is in a constant search for a better condition of living so that the amount of peaceful happiness it quests after finally is attained, and Life is at peace with itself.

Peace (*shanti*) has always been the spiritual aim of the discipline known as Hinduism.

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The Hindu mind accepts a heaven but this heaven that the Hindu speaks of does not indicate any 'spatial existence'. Instead, it denotes a spiritual stage of the mind which arrests the being with a wholesome feeling of inner tranquillity. A successful Hindu is a man at peace with himself.

How to achieve this peace? What does the Hindu think about? What is its special distinctiveness? How does it grow and sustain itself so that in more than six thousand years it has suffered hardly any basic change?

From time to time throughout the ages the Hindu mind has searched for an answer. As a result of this persistent quest the Hindu's search (contained in the Hindu philosophy) has left for posterity several findings.

These are called the systems of acquiring an insight, an inner vision, i.e., the *Darshanas*. There are six systems of the Hindu *Darshana* in the orthodox school; besides the Jaina, the Buddha and the Charvaka or the *Lokayata* (popular, proletariat) systems.

All of them ultimately agree on one point. And that point is a state of serene peace, tranquillity, steadying the innate shifting nature of the mind, and then bringing it to a zero point where it would be completely detached, unrelated with any objective sensation, any attachment. Perfection of understanding removes attachment.

When mind is kept aloof from sensuous cognition, when mind is freed from what is generally called temptation, attraction or attachment, only then it ceases to be agitated. Only then a 'free' mind could become its own master. It could then fully guarantee free thinking, leading to pure consciousness, or *chit*. Then it becomes steady, clean, serene, independent. It becomes a mind-in-itself. The mind has attained a zero point. The mind becomes a *tabula rasa*. The power of *chit*, not the mind, then drives the man.

A completely detached state of the mind alone opens the door to consciousness (*chaitanya* or *chit*), which keeps itself beyond the reach of the grasps of senses. Seekers of material prosperity may not look for peace.

The seekers of sensuous satisfaction have no peace. To feed desire is to stimulate it. Desire is whetted on the sandstone of possessiveness. The power of pure consciousness, that is of *chit*, is attainable to only those who rid themselves of the promptings of a hungry famished mind which always throws consciousness in a bewildering sense of confusion.

The exercise of bringing the mind to this transcendental sublimative zero state, or the exercise of disciplining the mind to be itself, has always been a complex process. It is indeed a psychological process involving a whole gamut of mental syndrome that has to be subjected to a code of strict discipline.

The mind by nature is slippery. It expresses itself through restlessness. The Hindu mind has always been fascinated by the mysterious process that could bring man to a state of perfect peace, quietude, which he preferred to call bliss or *swarga* (*swa* + *ga*), the state one could reach only through one's 'own' efforts.

Over the hoary centuries, when the Vedic mind gradually was seeking development, ancients tried to, and experimented with, discovering a perfect method of gaining the serenity of tranquil peace. In the process these pioneers have left to posterity different systems, or manuals, codified and arranged logically. The systems do not have to depend on, or refer to, an unseen power for achieving what they have achieved. The systems are entirely based on a rationale, and all the systems aim at achieving peace with one's own self, independent of any form of extra-territorial power-head. The subject and the aim of all the systems are one, though the paths differ.

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As far back as the Hindu mind can trace its own history, it finds the ancients of different ages and different regions continuously searching for a way to gain peace, or to overcome the tribulations of the mind, which is found most of the time suffering helplessly under this or that pressure, which is popularly recognised and known as passion. Passions have many forms. As a result of these continuous efforts from the Vedic ancients, mankind has inherited the highly analytical as well as synthesized six systems, the orthodox *Sat-darshana-s*, which prescribe the disciplines required for bringing the mind to a zero point, that is for attaining a state of serenity derived from tranquil peace.

All the systems are targeted to achieve one objective: viz., a perfect clarity of the mind, and to make the mind its own master. All the systems aim at clearing the mind of emotional bondage, such as passions, desire, anger, greed and, above all, ego and carnality.

The systems so designed, when put to practice, achieve the goal of mental liberation, and reach the pure state of *chit*, which is the source of clear consciousness (*chaitanya*), the 'super' state of intellectual achievement and spiritual power.

Methods may differ from this to the other system but the aim of all the six systems as well as those of the Jainas, Buddhists or Charvakas is the same, i.e., for achieving perfect peace, a full control over the mind is essential.

All the systems emphasize intellectual analysis. For achieving this, the systems prescribe a rationally laid out method of practices. All these systems in their own way assure success to the aspirant. These are, if not anything, at least logical, rational, and analytical. Man alone could achieve this without having to refer it to a superpower. It is an independent way.

II

But things and methods that are only logical and analytical almost always miss one essential thing. They miss the heartbeat. They miss the invaluable 'human touch.'

Through missing the elements of emotion and rigidly following the systems, the general human behaviour is likely to become gradually austere, rigid, although immaculately perfect and scrutinously infallible. Too much emphasis on severe logic eventually dries up the essential balm of emotion which is found so essential for all-around development. A normal man is a composite entity: half emotion, half reason. One who enjoys a balance between the two is a complete man; the imbalanced suffer internally.

As a guide for growth of the inner man these methods prescribed in the six systems appear to be excellent and almost perfect. The only drawback that these systems suffer from is that they are too perfect; too perfect to be understood and undertaken by the common man, the vast proletariat majority of the land. Emotion is an essential ingredient for human growth like colour in flowers or taste in fruits.

And the common mass is moved more easily by emotional drives, or instinctive impulses, which can be neither neglected nor ignored. By neglecting the emotive in man in preference to rigid rationality, we eventually neglect the larger section of the population who lives and dies at emotional levels. When the unknown aborigine cave artist draws pictures on the rock-backs, he is not commercially or otherwise prompted to do so. It is the emotive in him that makes him make a flute, and fill a valley with unheard of musical creations.

We should always bear in mind that the emotive proletariat exceeded the cultured Vedic population by almost three to one. The mass of this naturally emotive population was forced to remain outside the rigid classical Vedic systems, as well as from the orthodox six systems of Vedic discipline.

It was indeed a sad situation. The modern sociologist would look at this arrangement with a sour eye.

Nonetheless, the systems prevailed. With that flourished the Brahmanical world, a world that claims to this day that the systems saved the soul of India. Perhaps they did. But did they save the flesh and bones of India? They saved the life beyond, but what about the life here?

All scholars do not agree with this view. The Protestants, for there were many, included great thinkers, Brahmins as well as Kshatriyas, representing the two highest ranks of the Aryan or the Vedic society. Of course, the dumb millions automatically and helplessly looked for an escape from this high browism, this dominance. They always hopefully looked for a 'lead'·in this respect; but always ended up with being 'dupes' of their 'elder brother'.

It is in this context of protest against entrenched orthodoxy that we are thinking of those three of the original philosophers, men of the very highest calibre of spiritual excellence, and of highly independent revolutionary character who had been giving the most severe jolts to the well-knit Vedic block.

Of course these were: one, the Great Jaina Tirthankara Prince Mahavira, and two, his cousin Prince Siddhaartha, better known as the Buddha. There was yet another, a third one (less known but not less important), Chaarvaaka. This dour and rigid revolutionising 'protestant' was indeed a Brahmin. Chaarvaaka, however, quoted the Vedic Rishi Brihaspati as his mentor.

All in all, over the faded centuries voices were raised against the Brahmanical stranglehold and the grave thinkers (Brahmins themselves) began to make earnest efforts to show to the common mass that the so-called systems did not address to the members of 'the society' in general.

The Brahmanical elites studiously kept themselves aloof and distinct from the people of the 'lower' ranks, the children of the soil, the eternally downtrodden, down-driven multitude. Education or training, especially of any elevating character was meant only for the upper classes, i.e., the select and the Vedically cultured alone (Cf. Satyakama, Javala, Shavari, Ekalavya, etc.).

Exceptions could be cited here and there but generally the Vedic system had really nothing to offer to the working class except ignorance, toil, serfdom and absolute submission.

When for the same crime a Brahmin was set practically free, or escaped by earning a mild reproof, a member of the 'fifth' class, belonging to the serfs, one of the last category of the Brahmanical hierarchy, could be expelled permanently from his tribe or village, or buried alive, or roasted in burning oil.

Distinct from the three fortunate upper classes, the general mass for their spiritual and cultural growth had to address themselves to what their ancient ancestors had relied on, namely, the study of the variations of nature, and the bountifulness of its thoroughly mysterious gifts.

Thus, they sincerely believed nature and nature alone as their mother, provider and teacher. They tried to follow the mysteries and the vagaries of nature, nature in its smiling mood as well as its ferocious form. The mysteries confounded them. From this kind of psychosis it was but one step to accept accidents as ordained recompense, superstition as divine will, and pacification of the wraths of nature and natural calamities as their chief religious duty.

Since they were largely followers of nature, and since nature was all they knew and dealt with, and since they devotedly and earnestly brought their homage to nature and the natural laws, they were referred generally in the Vedic culture as '*Praakrit*'-s or 'Sons of Nature'. Their language, as distinct from the Aryan Sanskrit, was generally known as 'Praakrit or Pali.' This language was a language spoken by the 'natural' or basic man (not of Aryan stock) and by women of the Aryan household.

III

Of course a strict observation and deep study of the ways of nature alone could evolve a pattern of religions veneration. The mysteries of nature were confusing enough, and even terrifying to exact respect and regard. Religion is made of such stuff. Side by side with the sophisticated ways of Aryan thinking a religion of the soil, a religion based in nature, automatically found its growth. Indeed, this nature-religion had been the time-honoured religion of man, with love and terror as its motive. This is as old as the times. This was older than the Vedas, older than any written language.

Vagaries apart, nature followed a given system that had been derived from unseen and unknown laws, but these laws were strictly inviolable, and mostly predictable.

Yet quite a bit of it remained merged into the depths of the inexplicable. This drew from the ancient social communes a spirit of awe and reverence generally associated with superstitious beliefs. All religions are basically rooted in these superstitious beliefs, and in the Vedas, where there are a number of nature-gods.

The non-orthodox children of the soil derived much of their thoughts from this kind of close study of nature and man. They based their thinking on man, nature and on the griefs that trouble man and agonize him. Life was the first god; pain and fear were the anti-gods.

Thus they evolved their own manuals and codes over the years from time immemorial. These sons of the soil, through their studies of nature, through shocks of fear and expectations of hope and remedies from sudden disasters evolved a vast code of conduct, which formed 'their' religion, the religion of the *Praakrits*, i.e. the religion of the sons of the soil.

Through the hoary centuries the mass of beliefs and practices which these autochthons had amassed helped them to build up an independent religions system. This was the aboriginal system as taught by Mother Nature, *Prakriti*, and *Shiva*, the primal Male (*Veejam-Akshayam*), the seed of all beginnings. The original residents of the subcontinent formed a social block with their own ideas of the supernatural and the divine will which influenced their mode of living. What is the divine for but for bringing a needed intervention, some consolation to the deprived and the agonized, and a streak of hope for them in their life?

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This accounts satisfactorily for the non-Vedic character of the aboriginal *dharma*. It was based on principles of attaining a peaceful mental equilibrium. A good portion of the principles of this *dharma* was contained in the unorthodox schools of 'Hindu' thought as we find enthroned in the principles of Jainism and Buddhism. Under the influence of these popular disciplines, the basic and humane spirit of compassion gradually turned into a dogma.

The guiding principles of both Jainism, as preached by Mahavira, and of Buddhism as preached by Gautama Buddha, the Amitabha, were based on a kindly and sympathetic attitude towards life. Both the spiritual leaders realized that the cycle of a normal life has to pass inevitably through various stages of gradual development, ending helplessly in disease, suffering, and finally death.

The phenomenon did not surprise Mahavira. He, the elder of the two reformers, was not unusually perturbed by the cyclic phenomenon of natural events such as birth, growth and death. The thought about the future of an individual after his demise did not so much disturb the equanimity of either Mahavira or the Buddha (although their later followers found themselves enmeshed deeply about the speculative aspects of a life after death).

Both of these spiritual leaders had been engrossed about the conduct of life itself. Here and now was more important and relevant to them than mere speculative arguments about here and hereafter.

Thus many philosophers would like to think that neither Mahavira nor Gautama preached so much a religion as they were busy formulating a code of conduct, ethically tenable and philosophically sustainable, which could ensure for man as well as for the world of man a well laid pattern of peaceful coexistence.

Respect toward life was the chief aim of these thinkers. Such respect automatically led to sympathy, understanding and tolerance.

They also noticed that for the cultivation of these qualities, one need not blindly lead oneself through a hypothesis which accepted an overlord, a god. Man and man alone, and much more than that, life itself was to them the supreme reality. For these unorthodox thinkers nothing else mattered. The Buddha's aim in life was as contained in the prayer: 'All I want to achieve in my life is to bring an end to the suffering of the living beings (*Kaamaye duhkha taptaanaam naraanam aarti naashanam*).' In other words, when life is honoured, respected, sympathized and taken care of, all other factors are automatically taken care of. Life was the only reality for these pragmatic reformers and the suffering of life was their only concern. Man does not need to invent any extra-territorial identity overlooking or overlording the conduct of life. Life need not be confusingly encumbered by an imaginative or hypothetical division into areas of rewards or punishments.

Life need not be seen in two cameras. What was there before life, and what loomed after death demanded very little curiosity from the Buddha and his followers as long as the present life, the 'living present', was guided on principles of charity, compassion, fellow-feeling and love. Life must keep room for the virtues of forgiveness and sympathy. Life must love life. Serenity is achieved through loving all, taking all as equal. No discrimination, no tension; no tension, no pain; no pain, no jealousy, no ego; no ego, all is serenity, peace, contentment.

High philosophy and sophistry apart, man and his sufferings here in this life, appeared to them as matters of greater concern than all the talks about god, heaven, hell, and the rest of the hypothetical talks. The followers of the Buddha thought these were the futile ways of misguiding the human mind and throwing them deeper into confusion. Perfect serenity leads to perfect compassion, perfect peace. That peace is more lasting than the Vedas.

Not the Vedas or their gods on high, but nature, man and the human sufferings have drawn from these 'matter of fact' Buddhist thinkers their views of how to discipline the human ego so that man could live happily with his neighbour, and more importantly, with his inner self.

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This of course is a very general view of both Jainism and Buddhism, both of which have been called unorthodox. As ages passed (for the date of Gautama Buddha was 500 BC., and that of Mahavira was even earlier), both the systems had collected much of the speculative thoughts that had gathered around the Vedic thinking.

The dominance of Vedism had negatively set aside a major part of the population from the benefits of learning, wealth and spiritual discipline. It was bound to result in a social imbalance. In its turn, it resulted in an irreparable cultural and social divide. Two concurrent streams of culture flowed through centuries, one keeping its distance from the other. In language, dress, food, music, art, rituals and even god, each was different from the other as a snake from a rope, as flower from iron-dust. Each lived within its self-imposed limitations. One called themselves Aryans, or the 'cultured,'and the other was named 'Dravidas'; one was the 'Suras,' and the other was the 'Asuras.'

Each maintained its distinct traits and religious formats. As the Aryans had their rituals, so the non-Aryans insisted on their own. As the Aryan god was conceived as a male, the non-Aryan god was conceived as a female, Ma/Mother. The latter, the original autocthons, lived with their divine ideation conceived as a prolific female form which encouraged fertility, fecundity (cf. Krittika, Shashthee, Artemis, or Diana of many breasts, Nana, Ishtar, etc.). 'Here-and-now' was more relevant to them than a hypothetical 'hereafter'which to them appeared no better than speculation.

Between the two views, the land was crowded with a series of multicoloured, multifaced rituals, without which religious life of either appeared to have been vacant and unfulfilled.

Both Jainism and Buddhism, which originally were simple religions addressed to immediate human problems, and which recommended for them a very simple code of conduct, simple to follow even without attending a school or being inducted by any special priest, over the years had collected much of that aboriginal ritualistic fanfare which the Buddha had originally tried to avoid.

But the Brahmancial influence was so dominant in the subcontinent that within a few centuries even these protestant religions fell under the spell of forms, priests, and worst of all, rituals. (We shall come to this mystic growth of the two non-Vedic schism in connection with tracing the growth of Tantra and Tantricism.)

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It is not difficult to observe from this position that the idea of a godhead was redundant to either Jainism or Buddhism. This is why, both being subjectively analytical in persuasion and discipline, not a single of the systems of the Indian philosophical schools, inclusive of the Charvakas or the Lokayatas, has been considered 'in class' with the reputed six Indian philosophical systems. Neither the godless nor those who do not believe in heaven or hell could be graded by them as classical, or orthodox, or Brahmanical. So the realists, the Jaina-Buddha-Charvaka commune, together, were rejected by the idealists. In one fell swoop both Jainism and Buddhism were declared non-canonical, apocryphal.

Much later, in the days of religious decadence, even this grand and courageous protesting view, the concept of putting man and his sorrow above all other theoretical concepts, had to take a back seat. (All man-concocted canons, like the cycles of life and death, or of growth and decay follow the laws of ascendance and decadence.)

New canons obstructed the simple and compassionate view of the Buddha. The followers of these new ideas became seriously involved in the concepts of hell and heaven. The neo-Jainas and the neo-Buddhists even fell for the trap of mysticism, superstition, magic, and even necromancy (cf. Nagarjuna, Srijnana, Atisha.) It was indeed sad, but perhaps it was also inevitable.

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This change in the religion of the soil and of man was later recognized as Tantra: Tantra, because the word denotes traditionally accepted forms, coming from undelved past without any break, as the yarn comes out of cotton fluff as long as the flux holds. This is why a significant name was given to this way of traditional system of conceiving and worshipping the divine as Tantra, i.e., the continuous strand.

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Why did Tantra have so much influence? Where indeed lay the secret of its popularity? And of its universality?

The question disturbs us. We shall have to come to discuss this aspect of the problem a little later.

However, all these aspects of the changes in Buddhism and Jainism came out of the many facets of the running history of a naturally religious people, with an intensely absorbed spiritual bent of mind. These facts inevitably gather through the years heaps of garbage, along with the changing facts. A running stream collects garbage which in time is moulded into new soil, new growth. Formats, manuals, superstitions, local and tribalistic symbolizing psychograms, psychographs, occultism and plain sorcery gradually eased into accepted forms and accepted practices in the Tantra-milieu.

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In moments of dire danger man always bends for easier and immediate ways out. This is how time and history always contribute to an ancient theme, reducing it to commonality, and at the same time making it lose its embryonic history and purity of form.

It is a natural law that in this process of change the young and the strong alone are destined to survive but the old and the weak fall easy prey to extensive spread of undergrowth and fungi. There was no escape. In the course of time the law of inevitability overcame what was once the vibrant protesting faiths. The followers of Jainism and Buddhism too began to think in terms of Vedic images, such as heaven, hell, rewards, punishments, atonements, special rites, for which they became dependent on the priestly prescriptions.

Tantra was shaping itself in the embryo of Jainism, Buddhism, Lamaism, of which the glorious flowering was named as Mahayana, which is a living faith with a following of millions. Let us in this context regard the ancient form of the *dharma* as popularized by the simple but moving sermons of Jesus. The current of time and its inevitable corrupting influence has helped to choke that simple and heart-stirring Sermon on the Mount with confusing contradictory superstitious beliefs, elaborate forms, pedantic verbiage and mysticism. Today it is almost impossible to sift the true Christ message from the elaborate canonical superstructure.

By and by we shall have to come to grips with this aspect of time-inspired inroads of inevitable changes into the systems of Jainism and Buddhism.

IV

Here we are not concerned with history and life of the Vedic people. We are concerned with that momentous divide which split a human society into two broad sections: one, the elite, who never worked on the soil; and the other, the serfs, whose only privilege in life was to render service to the upper ranks.

The first group was entirely fascinated by its own systems of thinking which gave to the world the treasures of the Vedas and the Upanishads.

This was also the group, or the section of the people who were almost bemused by tiaras and tiaras of complicated and sophisticated rituals of their own creation. The rituals, generously provided with drinks, meat and revelry, often turned into brawls and orgies.

A group of people was earmarked as specialists in these ritualistic performances. They were regarded as high as next of kin to the very gods worshipped, at times even higher. The God Vishnu worshipped the feet of the Brahmin Bhrigu.

This privileged class gave them the codes of their customs and behaviours, and held the rest of the society in a stranglehold of a 'manual for social conduct'. An error in that conduct could be highly punishable, or expensive, or both.

The other section of the same society was kept completely segregated. This section, the aborigines, the autochthoms of the country, functioned on their own codes of conduct, and were collectively known as the Janas, or the Pukkasas, Kolas, Shavaras, Chandalas, Mundas, Nagas, etc. They were generally classified according to their different and distinct communes such as Asuras, Kinnaras, Yakshas, Gandharvas, Danavas, Apsaras, Nagas, Krikaras, Kapis, Suparnas, Guhyakas, Siddhas, etc. The Vedics called them the Dasas, or the serving class, i.e., the Serfs.

But they were neither serfs, nor in any way to be kept ignored as peoples or tries to be ill considered. In number they were in majority of almost one to five and in matters of special skills and arts they were so deft and famed that in terms of need the Vedic community sought for their prized assistance in engineering, building, crafts, medical knowledge.

They had been, at least some of them had been, powerful enough to have challenged from time to time the autocratic superiority of the Vedics. Some of them even got intermixed through matrimonial ties. Indra, the leader of the upper class, known as the Devas, had for his wife the daughter of a Danava, Puloma. The two sections were very often connected through ties of matrimony, or even through chance offsprings from chance liaisons. Yet the sections remained clearly earmarked. The Devas kept to their codes, and the Nagas, or the Asuras as they were collectively called, had their own codes of conduct.

Likewise, the Asuras, or the Danavas, as we shall call them collectively hereafter, had their own codes of conduct, own norms and forms, own gods and their own concepts of religion and rituals.

Naturally, the Nagas or the Asuras divined their own gods. And, as could be expected, these gods pertained to the features of Nature, some mild and pleasant, some others terrible and ferocious. With nature and within Nature they formed their life cycle, and suggested their spiritual obligations.

Their Life-rhythm vibrated with the changes in changing Nature. The seasonal gifts from the bountiful Mother's Nature, the bounties and the furies of Life and Time, the cyclic order and the enduring unbreakable sequences which were almost refinedly, precisely, mechanically cut out by forces beyond their ken or comprehension never failed to keep them in awe as well as gratitude. Thus Nature and its mystique, the charms and fears of the Unknown, formed the very basis of their religion. It was a religion of Fear and Love, of the Mother and her periodical chastisements.

They knew that the chastisements periodically administered by a protective hand are meant more for a routine chastening of the Life-process. They knew that without those brakes the very purpose and functioning of the Life-process would be jeopardized. They accepted Nature's furies along with her bounties with a spirit of resigned equanimity, childlike simplicity. In thousands of lines of vibrating prayers this Mystique of the Great-Mother has been recognized.

Nature formed the basis of their godhead, and they visualized Nature as their divine source. She was the all-pervading. Prakriti, the Mother who brings beings to Life, provides for them, and in time absorbs them as mere grist into her bottomless embryo, or immeasurable flux.

In fact, they held on to Nature and Nature alone, which the Vedics also did, but not so openly, neither so exclusively. Nature gods in the Vedas have been praised in a language of poetical exposition, using images, symbols, metaphors and even allegories.

It was the language of priests, of Brahmins, of the sophisticated. Quite understandably it lacked the simplicity, the emotive content of the pastoral ease of the frank people of the soil.

The tribal communities used simpler expressions to address their gods. In fact, the language was so simple as could not go beyond a syllable or two at a time; and most of what it meant to say was direct and emotional, without any show of literary expectations, or Brahmanical flourish.

Thus the contact between the divine and the worshippers, in their case was direct, without indulging into any kind of literary flourish such as allegory, metaphor, or symbolism.

Mostly the important prayers went in onomatopoeic sounds. Since they found the natural phenomena so filled with a mystique of its own, and since the entire functioning of life, as they found it, was so filled with contradictions, the language and purport of their rituals was both simple and mysterious.

That language believed in no complicated grammar, or in no stylized prosody. The language was typically reminiscent of what has been called a cabalistic abracadabra hoodoo or voodoo. Whatever their form or motive, one singular characteristic that enlivened their prayers was their intense emotive content.

V

There appears a significant line in the Vedas, which is quoted in the Upanishads also. '*Ekah sat; vipraah vahudhaa vadanti*' clearly declares for all times that the real is one; only the learned speak of this one in a variety of ways. This statement admits it for a fact that the godhead as conceived by the Vedic mind could be one and only one, and never more than one. This is a basic principle, a cosmic phenomenon (Gita-XI). The recognition of this truth makes a Hindu what he is despite many differing facets. To feel a Hindu is a unique experience because of this broad liberalism. This is true and has been true to this day. The entire Vedic literature is filled with the names of hundreds of gods like Indra, Aditi, Varuna, Tvashtri, Aryaman, Agni, Saranyu, Naasatyas, Vaak, Soma, Soorya, Parameshthi and many others. Yet the fact that the Divine is indivisible and unique has been emphasized again and again.

The vast Vedic literature touches upon this point of the godhead being one and only one, periodically, as a refrain. There is no doubt whatsoever that the Vedic savants had realised the one, and insisted upon realizing the truth of reality being one and only one. A deviation from this doctrine was impossible to think of.

Then why the names of so many divinities? Why offerings to so many when only one is the Real? Why approach that real with offerings of material objects? Why has the worship of the only one been encumbered by so many dogmas and rituals?

The contradiction is palpable and seemingly beyond any simple form of reconcilement. The answer to this very complex enigma lies in the nature of the Aryan or the Vedic people as opposed to the non-Aryans. Essentially the Vedics were seekers of the real but subjective truth. As such they were idealists of the purest mould. A thorough study of the Vedic literature does not leave any doubt in the mind of a scholar that even as they offered the various hymns to the various forms of deities they were essentially expressing their concepts of the roles of the kaleidoscopic aspects of nature, now in glee, now in grief, now fierce and destructive to the extreme, now benign, beautiful and protective.

All in all the one real expressed itself, as they conceived and knew, in a variety of ways; and therefore, in a variety of forms as well. And they did so in a variety of eulogistic hymns praising those aspects of nature which were found worthy of being sung. Hence the apparent many-ness of the one.

This original straightforward way, however, through the hoary centuries got blurred. The Vedic insistence on oneness through the years must have been corrupted, perverted and pulverized through a maze of priestic rituals.

Despite the corruptions, the golden purity of the ideal of oneness, the idea itself, never left the Vedic mind. The secret of this mysterious position underlies the very texture of the Vedic thought about the oneness.

Let us explain.

Who or what was the Vedic divinity or the Vedic creator? What did they really think about how this creation, life and all that life involves, came into being? Once we answer this question, the henotheistic enigma of the Vedic mind which firmly believed in the oneness of the divine and yet which indulged in the prayers, hymns, and offerings to the many, shall be solved.

Within the Vedic literature there is evidence to point out that the people who composed the Vedas were far too sophisticated not only to be using allegories, symbolism and metaphors in their hymns, but they were even cynically disposed towards the substance of their own divinations whenever they opted for throatful hymns regarding the mystery of nature and the magic of life.

Besides the evidence of cynicisms, bordering on snobbishness, there are compositions that question the very existence of god as the creator. Creation came into being, they thought, because of a mystic cosmic law (*rita*) which operated through matter, and expressed itself as life (*pranah*). In the Upanishads this life force is called the cosmic presence, the *mahat*, the Brahman, space-time combine signifying a totality of ideation and form within a cyclic order of rotating.

VI

Scholars interested to know of such sources may refer to the *Naasadeeya Sookta* hymns or the famous *Hiranyagarbha* hymn, both of which question effectively and intellectually the very existence of god!

Yet it is impossible to say that the Rig Vedic people were atheists. Most certainly and emphatically they were not, as their wonderful and eloquent hymns proclaim.

But their god depended on an intellectual perception which followed the strictest demands of reason.

The Rig Vedic god was founded on a rationally contemplated perception. That perception followed the path of a logical enquiry about the origin of matter and its eventual disposition.

That analysis established the source of, and the relation between, the material world and its spiritual disposition, as much scrutinously as logic could have investigated. The origin or the embryo of creation (*Brahmaanda* or the embryo of the totality of the creational phenomenon), according to them, rested on what they called *Hiranya-grbha* (the golden womb). What was that? A vague explanation of this mystery has been sounded in the fourth chapter of the famous *Bhagavat Geeta*. There the great master and preceptor Krisna Vasudeva is supposed to have said, "*Mama yoni-r-mahad Brahma/Tasmin garbham dadhaamyaham*! (My womb is the supreme space beyond, in which I plant the seed of creation.) The line further explains: All material objects spring from this (super space).

In other words, the secret of the origin of matter lies in a conception, a well laid logical conception. Matter in its earliest and embryonic form lies beyond human perceptive faculties (*avyakta*). It is the nature of matter to change its form. Change is inherent in time, which is both *sphura* and *kshaya*, also *kshaya* and *laya*. From *laya* again to a new form, i.e., emergence to decadence and finally one with the original flux from where in time again a new form and new life cycle would emerge. All this is the cosmic influence of the perpetual interplay between matter and time (*Avyakta* > *Purusha* > *Bhuta* > *Kala* > *Purusha* > *Avyakta*).

It is a cyclic event. The event is caused by time which moves, moves and moves in an eternal cyclic order. All movements are cyclic. Change therefore is inherent in time. Time is change. Any change calls for power, i.e., *shakti*, change being the result of *shakti* (power-energy). Change being time, energy or *shakti* is time or *kala*.

So to worship Kala (or Kala in feminine gender) is to worship the supremacy of the energetic and changing faces of time. In the Gita, Vasudeva Krishna says, "I am Time," the decaying force in creation. That is to say, God is not to be regarded as only creator or protector. That would be partial and therefore defective knowledge. Look at the totality of the God concept which is to see the creative and the changing aspects concurrently and simultaneously.

In time things come to being and in time things go to decay and get reduced to the original flux. The middle phenomenon constitute the life drama. From the green room to the limelight of the stage, then the curtain drops, and then back to the green room. This whole process is the nature and gift of time. And this, if you please, is God, the playmate of *shakti*, power, energy, playing in and with matter.

That origin, the dramatic perpetuity of movement, could only be intellectually conceived and spiritually perceived. In continuation of the line in the Gita above quoted, we also read that all matter and all material objects find their origin from that Golden Egg, *Hiranya-garbha* (*Sambhavah sarva bhootaanaam tato bhavati.*—Gita).

For us it is fundamental to go about our research along the line suggested in the Gita which refers to *mahad yoni*, a womb that cirucumscribes, sheaths and envelopes all space, even the super space which outreaches what we call the outer space.

Considering the remote age when this explanatory ideology was conceived and enunciated, the overwhelming idea was a marvellous conception arrived at by sheer intellectual forces of logic, and of a basic earnestness about grasping spiritual essence of things. Without this earnestness, this inner urge, this knowledge remains a closed book.

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We could only then imagine and deal scientifically with the space which the Veda calls *dyau* or *antariksha*.

After the discoveries of Einstein the later space scientists now say that the knowledgeable outer space is but the fringe and hem of the *mahad brahma*, the outer space which lies beyond human ken, and rationally speaking, would ever and ever lie beyond human knowledge but not beyond the meditational perception and spiritual attainment of the ancient seers.

So the *mahad brahman* or the outer space unknown would always remain to us an inference, a grand, ultimate and unique source, from which all material creation had to proceed.

We go to the Gita again. We go to the same verse which says, "*Brahma mahad yoni, aham beeja pradah pitaa,*" that entire space is the womb of life, and *aham* (i.e., I) is the giver of the seed. (I=supra-consciouness or *chaitanya*). The language is as mystic as the subject demands. If the word *aham* is translated as 'I', as a dictionary would recommend, the purport of the underlying meaning would remain dumb. Here *aham* means consciousness or *chaitanya*. Consciousness or *chaitanya*, to be operative and effective, has to have assistance from some driving, initiative power which alone could make it function. *Chaitanya* is a functional activity and could operate only with the help of some driving power. All functioning needs power or the drive, *shakti*. This power or *shakti* is the Life Force, the *prana* which expresses itself through the activity known as *chaitanya*. Without life there is no expression of consciousness. It is the life force which works as the inspirer of, instigator of, the life force which instigates, awakens our *dhee shakti* (power of intellection).

In the famous *Gayatri* hymn which a Hindu recites almost every morning, he prays only for the cosmic power to saturate his capacity to absorb more and more of true knowledge. The power is an instigator, an inspirer, *prachodayitri* as the Vedas say.

VII

In Aryan or Vedic concept matter and energy are spoken of as two only to facilitate our meagre power of understanding. In fact, energy is inherent in matter. That is to say *Shakti* is inherent in *Shiva*. The Vedics could not think of matter bereft of *Shakti*. The one is an indivisible element of the other. To see them as two is just a delusion.

True knowledge suffers no delusion. Although the *Brahman*, or the *Aatman* is one and only one, the otherness of the one has to be contemplated as if the otherness of the moonlight could be contemplated as different from the moon. The light is inherent in the moon, as shadow in light. "*His loneliness was unbearable to Him; hence He wished for a second; and split Himself into two to play with, and amuse Himself*." So says the Upanishad, i.e., the Vedas.

Is that not very true? The cosmic mystery contains the unit of matter and energy wrapped into one. While the matter part is completely inert and dull, the energy part instigates and inspires (*prachodayantee*) it in order to be busy with the process of creation. *Shakti*, the power, keeps herself busy playing with *Shiva*, the inert, the still, the space. This is the idea that kept the non-Aryan mass, the non-Vedic, fascinated by the concept of a mother-figure instead of the father-figure that the Upanishadic people divined to contemplate (*pita no-si*).

The mother and not the father was the dominant idea that had kept the tribal masses of India, and perhaps all over the world fascinated. It was the image of the mother, the Madonna which in fact had kept the entire non-Vedic races and tribes all over the world bemused and fascinated.

The *aham,* spoken of earlier in the quoted line from the Gita, could mean this pervading *chaitanya* (consciousness) in creation acting through the force known as *prana* or life.

Life is obviously a functional phenomenon. Life is inherent in creation. Creation without life would be a dead stock. Origin of matter could have been conceived by material science but the functional phenomenon of the life force or of Shakti has been escaping the materialists. Theories have been advanced and withdrawn without arriving at a definite conclusion.

The ancients had been thinking about the origin of all creation. In doing so they found that visible matter is composed of invisible matter. Invisible to human perception it may be but nonetheless it must exist because something cannot come out of nothing, out of a void. Something must come out of something. Even in an imperceptible state matter has to exist in order to emerge as matter.

Although the invisible state remains hidden from the immediate perception of man, it could be conceived through the logic of observation and inference.

Materially perceived, the ultimate in matter ends up with a form known as atom but the atom itself is also composed of the same matter. Being matter, theoretically, it could also be further split and so on *ad infinitum*.

Matter is and in spite of its reduction in size, it shall be. Existence could not be conceived without a matter base. *Astitva,* i.e. existence, presumes a structural and therefore spatial presence. (This idea has been contained and expressed in the ideological word *Shiva*, which is also described as *Bhava*, the Being, the Existence).

But matter alone cannot create. For creation, for any creative activity, *prana* or the life force is indispensable.

When the Gita refers to *aham* it actually and idealistically refers to the life force (*prana*), the conscious *prana*, *Atman* acting through the expression of consciousness or *chaitanya*.

(This is another reason why in codifying the Sanskrit grammar the great scholar Panini denoted 'I' as *uttama purusha*, literally meaning 'the best person,' 'the foremost person.') English grammar calls it the first person. The 'I' in us refers to the *aham* in us which is also called the *Atman*. The Gita says, "*Uttamah purusha-s-tanyah parama-atme-tyudaarhita/yo lokatrayamaavisya vibhartyavyaya eeshvarah.*" (The I in us is also known as the Supreme *Atman*. He is also known as the Supreme *Purusha* or the Supreme Person.)

It is this person, this *Atman*, this 'I' that covers all the three worlds, i.e., the entire sphere of consciousness.

The 'I' in us is the *Atman*; the 'I' in us is the *Brahman*; the 'I' in us is also time, the *Kala*. (*Ahamaatmaa Gudaakesha*—the Gita; *Aham Brahmaasmi*—Shankaraachaarya; *Kaalosmi*, I am Time—the Gita).

To realise this 'I' in us, to realize its nature, its purpose, its ultimate end, has been the supreme quest of yogis of all times. Not by intellection, not by scholarship, but with strong firmness, with unflinching determination alone, could the knowledge of this 'I' in us be achieved. It is not at all easy but it is sure. In their eyes "the substance of all spiritual quest lay within the depths of the unknown" (*dharmasya tatvam nihitam guhaayaam*). The nature and the form of God or *Atman* could only be described by silence (Upanishad). God, as they believed, could neither be defined nor realized in any formal representation. Realization of the divine grace alone was their ultimate aim and motive.

VIII

The space and the outer space lying beyond human comprehension, and understood only by such mystic (and perhaps a little confusing) sentences as "All beings subsist in Me...but being do not subsist in Me"—Gita: IX, was miles and eons away from the simple and direct comprehension of the unenlightened tribals. They wanted to have a god as their relative, as their own, a god to whom they could bring their demands in forms of prayers.

The Vedics were aware of a space beyond space (*mahat-bramha*) activised by certain principles of law which they called *rita*, and which they regarded as THE TRUTH, the paramount Brahman, the ultimate to be known and realized. (*Ritam satyam param Bramha Purusham Krishna-Pingalam/Oordhalingam viroopaksham Vishwa roopam namonamah*.) "The Brahma, the Purusha, or the Person who covers all, and is covered by all is the Cosmic Law, or the Reality. He, the Person, is dark and tawny (mysterious and colourless). He is conceived by what we see above (space). He is viewed by the Third Eye (the power of contemplation). The Universe is his Self."

"To that cosmic person I bow again and again." (*Shatapatha Brahmana*). They were thus confirmed believers in a cosmic idea of space and time, the cosmic space and the cosmic time following a cosmic set of firm laws radiating 'blessings' (at times fury) without which the speck known as the earth would have been thrown into a chaotic state of despair and disrepair, and consequently thrown into a bundle of miseries.

The composite well ordered system of compact and inviolable laws known as (*rita*) cosmos to modern science, firmly appeared to them as the only reality (*satyam*), the cosmic law (*ritam*), the Brahman, and the consciousness subsisting in the life process as *prana*. One represented the space, or 'is' or *bhava*; the other was the law, the *rita* itself, the functional part of cosmos, the time; space and time, i.e., Shiva and Shakti, matter and energy. Females, because they bore the sacred fissure marks on their body, were considered specially favoured by the blessings of the Mother, who, the simple folks imagined, stigmatized them as a beneficent deity with her own sign. Those who bore her sign came under her special protection. In the course of time the fissure sign, valued as a special holy stigma, was symbolically represented by a simple triangle adorned all over the Tantra world, i.e., all over the world of the primal aborigines which is the world of the Mother, the world of Tantra.

The sign was the Mother. In order to invoke the Mother or be in spiritual communication with her Spirit, devotees offered their prayers to this symbol.

Much later, when the sophisticated Vedic priests also, for their own motives, adopted the way of the Mother, they also adopted this symbol but denied to it its primal and most obvious implication. They covered it with their own interpretations, probably in an attempt to civilize the simple concept.

The three lined *mandala* or *yantra*, the symbol (of the triangle), represented to them, so they explained, the three *gunas* (qualitative classifications), as well as the three stages of life *srishti* (creation), *sthiti* (existence and growth), and *pralaya* (dissolution).

But all these are later Brahmanical confabulations, designed most probably to grab the growing influence and spread of the Tantric clientele. This did not work, however, as we shall see.

IX

In any case the sign of the triangle (the split or the fissure) became, in the course of time, an object of deep reverence. The sign always recalled the all-pervading mystique of the Mother, and its adoration signified man's deepest sense of gratitude to the creative spirit. The sign to them was essentially the Mother, and they invoked the spirit of the Mother through this sacred sign.

The sign, the sacred stigma, was the holy of holies. The animals who bore the mark remained adorable to the common mass. Adorable and precious because, for the males to have a hold on as many females as possible, a special status was awarded to them. Like any other valued possession such as land, gold, silver, or diamonds, which assists the common man to gain higher ranks, females too enjoyed very special attention and protection from males of all species, and a male who retained many such females, humans or animals, invariably commanded a special role of rank in society.

The females of the human species earned a special privilege because of this triangle sign. It is an assigned privilege accorded to them by nature, i.e., by the Mother herself. In some cultures, mostly aboriginal or nomadic, the females often held the upper hand (cf. Juno and Clytemnestra in Homer or the Byzantine Empresses Theodora I, II, and III).

Because of bearing the special fissure sign on their body, females enjoy to this day a venerated and inviolable status. They were considered the favourites of nature in as much as they formed the only species suitably fitted for multiplying, and thereby adding to their respective species, in fact to their very existence and continuity.

Up to that stage for thousands of those primitive years, the role of the male sperm working in the female foetus was completely unknown to man. The role of the male sex uniting with the female was accepted as only an instrument of momentary and natural source of pleasure. Man was viewed as a sporting companion and a strong support in hunts. The role of the male in female life was viewed as instrumental, not vital.

In paying homage to the females, the old world of the peasant and husband man paid homage to the Mother they loved and adored. The female menstruation, female embryo, the female foetus, the entire reproduction gamut, not necessarily her erotic propensities (which later on received so much of fanfare from poets and romantics), was held in great respect. That attitude and that regard have not died out to this day. In sophisticated behaviour the original attitude is still perceptible. In fact it plays a dominant role in art and literature of the heroic age (cf. *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir).

The myths of old assign to the women in general, and to the maids in particular, a very special status. From Delphos, Crete and Cyprus to the distant Assam and Angkor, almost in all the myths of all the lands this special position for the females, especially for the virgin, has been eulogised by priests, poets and the people alike.

The females were never offered for slaughter as sacrifice. In one or two rare cases when the law was transgressed, under very special circumstances, severe and epoch-making repercussions followed. Neither nature nor society ever condoned the heinous crime of shedding female blood. The singular instances of Ephigenia in Homer or of Joan of Arc or of Mary, Queen of Scots, have received condemnation from history.

This in its turn further confirms the assigned inviolability of the female, regarded, as always, a specially protected species.

The fire-god preferred their services to Him; the sun-god liked the females as anointed worshippers. Even the temple of Apollo or following the classical tradition, the Church of Jesus Christ also recognised the females as specially dedicated devotees. Their misuse, which was often kept a secret, has always been severely condemned.

The Mother's special sign has been venerated ever since the ancient times when religion was at a very early stage of formation. It sparks special signals in the memory lane to absorb the truth of the fact that the Mother is venerated and worshipped in all forms of the feminine.

To wipe out this imbedded faith under pressures of later sophistication is as childish as to try to hide flames under a carpet. It is both false as well as dangerous to push this dear love away beyond the margins and keep up a stern brusque pose which is false, hypocritical, damaging and misleading.

The cause of more than half of the sex-generated ills and aberrations of our sick society can be traced to this blatant continuation of hypocrisy. So far, as the anthropologists have scrutinized, both in the religious systems of the ancient and pre-ancient cultures as well as in the more sophisticated modern cultures, the same adoration of the female symbol persists.

The adoration of the Mother in the form of the Madonna, though accepted late, after thread-bearing controversies, registers the universality of this demand for adoration, this love for the reproductive genius of the earth, and of the children of the earth.

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But the new world, our world, lacks the vision, the courage, the frankness of admitting to the fact that the ills of the mind of our time trace their origin to the diseased view we hold about the values of the inviolability of the female sex. We often forget what life and culture owe to the Mother. How dreary would life become once this source of natural love has been sealed because of prudery and humbug. By admitting to the fact that in worshipping the female, the Mother, and in holding the female symbol as a consecrated stigma worthy of the highest adoration, and in accepting a form of worship where the simple emotional approach rather than reason directs all the activities of a happy or suffering mind, most of our sex and sex-associated ills and crimes would cease to torment the society.

To hide is a sin. The children in the Garden of Eden knew this at their eternally lamentable cost. Modern man is still applying that cost. Adoration of any kind expects emotional expression. Adoration is an indispensable component of true love. Love adores, helplessly adores. Love is divine. Man comes nearest to the divine grace through the graces of love. And the mother is the epitome of love; she is all love.

This is how side by side with more established sophisticated religions like the Vedic, Jaina, and Buddhist as well as those other religions which emerged from different parts of the old and the new worlds, a religion of the people, a religion of those who lived away from all sophistication, coexisted with a pronounced emphasis on emotional content in adoration.

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The word adoration is derived from a Sanskrit root, *aadriyate aadri*, which means to adore, to love with a degree of emotional fulfilment, spiritual elevation, and a touch of possessive glory. A mother's love for her child, her glorified feeling of owning exclusively an object of her own soul, best illustrates the feeling of adoration, an apex of self-achievement.

The earliest illustration of such adoration or devoted love, of love that ennobles itself by complete surrender, is found on the carvings on the Jaina and Buddha monuments (BC 4th and 3rd centuries).

The elevation of Yashodhara, Buddha's mother, or that of his wife Gopa, or that of his son Rahul in the works of the carvers, artists (cf. the Ajanta caves) clearly illustrates the point that the element of sentiment, of love and of submission and surrender had definitely cleared a way through the stern rocks of priestlihood at the time of the Vedas.

Besides this spiritual aspect, the emphasis on human relations, as demonstrated in the later religion, made it easy for the common mass, the backward multitudes of the caves and forests, to embrace a new kind of ministration. It appeared that they had been overwhelmed with a new interpretation of religious feeling.

They found that they could love and serve their gods and yet hold them as their own. They could, if they so wanted and deserved through the graces of their piety, become a partner, a closer partner at that, the closest maybe, of the deity they adored as their own. They had learnt to be close to their gods. They dared to sit close to, even embrace, their God as they did their mother. Henceforth we would clearly notice the entrance of the 'mother' motif in prayers.

This was a new attitude they had cultivated. It was a revelation. Love could win God's favour. It was a wide, very wide, departure from the holy, meaty, drinky and sweaty *yajnas* of the Vedic Brahmans whose gods had no time to get involved with the pains and troubles of the poor mortals. Through the profound encouragement they had received from the ministrations of the kind-hearted and loving Buddha they could pray at moments of dire distress. The Mother was in evidence in the image of Yashodhara and Gopa. The Mother was so real. The ideation of the divine suited better and closer to a mother motive.

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The aboriginal world all over freely indulged in offering its homage to the Mother deity through the media of dances, songs and popular and periodical celebrations. These often coterminated with the seasonal breaks of rains, harvesting, spring and success in hunts. Celebration and thanksgiving for success in battles with enemies or praying for such successes was also accompanied with songs and dances. All in all the cast-away world of humanity always celebrated their joyous moments with dances and songs. Such emotional expressions were essential ingredients for devotional thanksgiving or prayers.

Devotion or *bhakti*, an emotional medium, had made its mark in the psyche of the common man. This was certainly a gift of the Buddhist lessons they learnt. The Buddha's teachings had brought distant closer, the other man nearer, the stranger direct into the family circle, and the sick nearest to the heart. Selfless sacrifice became a necessary condition of praying sincerely. They learnt that without forming an established relationship, an abiding faith between life and life, man and man, mere wordy talk of appeal and prayers to God could never give man that peace of mind which he always seeks.

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Thus we find that the Mother-worshippers, the community of the Mother cult who all over the world depended entirely and sincerely on emotional outlets which they thought would reach the Mother surely and quickly, found a kind of spiritual support from the teachings of the Buddha.

The world view of divine intervention underwent a deep change after the Buddhist ministration which spread through Asia and beyond. Man was to strive and achieve his own liberation by earning his own peace of mind.

The quiet ingress of the charms of the Buddhist sermons, their humane message, their lessons of sacrifice, forgiveness, tolerance and compassion, their effective elimination of any man-made social barriers between man and man brought about a sea change in the attitude of the backward mass, so far as god and the divine compensations were concerned.

In other words, in their soul of souls they believed that the emotional way was the only sure way of coming to grips with the providential forces of nature or of the unseen powers that be.

They conceived and experienced a deeper degree of consolation and a firmer kind of assurance in reaching their gods through this emotional communication. Love for god must, of necessity, pass through a determined love for other lives, of all fellow beings. There could be no love for god without loving the lives around.

The new ministrations of the sermons of the Buddha spread with the speed of elemental forces of Eastern monsoons and Western storms. All the aborigines, all the deprived, all those who had been living away from the cultured society came under a spell. Religion had to get rid of its austere aspect; it had to relax. No more the expensive rites where drinking and feasting dominated, where the Brahmins alone enjoyed a privileged position, where wealth demonstrated its power, and ego, rather than submissiveness, flourished in the name of God.

Gautama Buddha, the Amitabha, came out with a novel form of religion. With life, man and love as the focal points, it swept away the Vedic exigencies and became fully inspired by a spirit of love and togetherness. God and man lived in a family unit. Thus the germs of later Christianity were laid.

It did not take much time for the new message to take root and spread. Many forms of the new message, according to the climatic conditions and traditional demands of the different societies, spread all over the globe.

Human society all over the old world, before and after the Buddha, had undergone a revolutionary change which affected all later religions, Semitic religions not excepted. We shall find later that the Jewish as well as the Islamic religions also came under the deep influence of God-love. Various aspects of love and its divine power formed the core of new psalms, new prayers, new lores and new images.

Bhakti, the religion of adoration and love, had covered a long march and established its power permanently.

The noise of chanting Vedic hymns, the smell of roasting meat, the calumny of dancing girls in and around the sacrificial grounds, the jostling, feasting, arguing, grovelling for gifts and more gifts, the sensuous stoking of the flames of desire and greed were all swept away, and a fresh and much cleansed breeze began to blow.

The celebrated six systems came in to breach the big divide. But none of the six could ever establish that there *was* a God. In fact, they instituted the presence of the soul over all and in all the objects, and conceived of a universality of conscious power, overwhelming space and time, and included in it the concept of *Brahman*.

In one stroke, a new age was ushered. Sacrifice was replaced by inner search and Rik-s and Saama-s were replaced by meditation. God-search was replaced by Self-search, and a determination of gaining an upper hand on the sensual provocations and demands was considered more imperative than gaining the favours of the many gods. Control, restraint, not excess, was the aim.

Was not the Buddha himself an example of this image of success through meditation and meditation alone? Did not his own life stand as a bright illustration of the success of the meditative power over the Brahmanical sacrificial *yajnas*? The message that service to life in general and to man in particular was much more relevant than service to a god who himself did not know how to administer divine justice, who himself could not solve the mystery of suffering, disease, and death.

Meditation to gain inner strength and purify carnal desires, and to realize the Self, became the sheet-anchor of the new trend. Service to life became a mission.

Love for all life was held as the supreme aim of a spiritual life: love and compassion, not selfish greed and passion.

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From the cave and the hunting man to the nature-adorers, from the pantheists to the worshippers of the primal Mother, from the worshippers of the Mother to the worshippers of the matrix or the source of all projections of new life, and from the worshippers of the *yoni* to the worshippers of the Vedic *yajnas*, *yajna* fire flaming out of the *kunda* considered as *yoni*, we have travelled a long long way.

Then from the rigid class-conscious Vedic system we moved to the Buddhist system, and reverted to the religion of adoration or *bhakti*, which contained the sweet sap of emotive love for life, the compassionate view of fellow beings, and finally, oneness with a loving god of our heart.

This was indeed a long survey stretching over six thousand years of human history. It took that time for love to come to its own as a human spirit that claimed a position of equality with god. Religion of love became a unique contribution of man's adventures with his inner spirit.

X

Rituals appear to be a spoilt child of civilization. It fascinates even wise men like Shankara, Vidyaranya, Abhivara, Gupta, and Ramanuja as well as the wise of other religious groups. It is like a wise man being fascinated by the charming gambols of a dancing baby. It is amazing to observe the hold that ritualism wields on the minds of even the most spiritual of the theologians, Luther, Knox, Goethe, Confucius not excepted.

Although the Buddha, who was disappointed after a study of the Vedas and the six systems, was the sternest advocate against all ritualisms and priestly monopoly of spiritual power, Buddhism along with its elder cousin Jainism ultimately got involved with ritualism. It is a sad submission of the noble to the mundane. Tons of treatises have been written on the practices of ritualism in both Jainistic and Buddhistic literature. Priestic laws dominated over humane involvement.

The lure was too tempting. Ethnic tribalism and ritualism are counterparts of the same trend for reaching the supernatural. Tribalism, supernaturalism, ritualism, feminism or the Mother-cult automatically open the back door to priestism.

Forces of time after Buddha, during the period of decadence, gave way to strange practices reminiscent of pre-Vedic primordial tribal times. Mother worship and nature worship easily fell victim to sorcery and magic.

Another type of priestcraft indulged in excesses completely disallowed in Buddhism. Yet the lure of wine, women and of the supernatural was too great for a decadent, degenerate people. A transformed type of new populist religion took over and the mass fell for the charm, which even now holds a populist attraction. Religion minus ritualism is the sun minus the light, the circle without a centre.

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It was the age of Tantra, where the Mother was and still is the predominant deity. The common mass provided its most ardent followers. Its emotional content (the Mother-child format) together with its fear-charged concept made it a very popular and convincing way of worship. Learned Buddhist scholars who visited Tibet, China, Japan and Indo-China, roaming up to countries in Antioch, Babylon and Asia Minor brought new ideas and spread them as Tantra, where the Mother and the female were held as a special and adored fetish.

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The spread of Buddhism had opened the gates of a general fraternity to overwhelm the rigid society of the Vedic people. The gates were flung so decidedly open, and the imperial rulers gave the trend so definite a welcome, that the future of pure Vedism was doomed for all times. The ancient *yajna* days and the days of priestic Brahmanical superiority, the days of the *tapovana*, Brahmanism, Vedism and all that the Aaranyakas codified faded into the background.

The general mass, and along with the general mass some of the learned too, became deeply involved in a new type of 'free' religion, where the Brahmanical bars got as loose as possible.

The new religion had several advantages which the old religion lacked. The first and foremost advantage was its freedom from any preistly, especially Brahmanical, stranglehold.

The people could perform the rites with the help of an adept or an accepted adept, even if the person belonged to a low caste, or was a woman or even an itinerant *sannyasi*.

After centuries of severe restrictions and bondage this sort of spiritual emancipation was destined to overstep its bounds. Tantra soon secured a nickname for its excesses. A whispering campaign kept the spread of Tantricism within restricted bounds. Tantricism became synonymous with charlatantism and hooliganism. It gathered an unsocial aura.

The glories of the Tantric catholicity and liberalism soon got entangled with drunkenness, profligacy, even murder. The Brahmin league and lobby again craftily took over what had been an exclusively proletariat area for prayers to the great Mother.

The spread of what had been a memorable and historical spiritual breakthrough, the ministrations of both Mahavira and Buddha (Jainism and Buddhism) were overcome by their inevitable degeneration. The glories of the liberalized codes of Tantra turned out to be a degenerate form of heinous black magic, riddled with *abhichaaras* (spells and wizardry), and getting into a new form of worship which was generally dreaded. The baffling tale of this transformation has a long and complicated history (cf. the Gahrawala Queen Kumaradevi of Kashi and the associated history of her Tantric practices).

Out of this extremely confusing situation several things came out to stay put permanently, and clung on to become parts of the huge Hindu pantheon. Buddha himself carved out a niche for himself in that pantheon and became enthroned in temples, when Buddhism never countenanced temples at all much less his statue-forms. The Buddha was venerated as an incarnation of Vishnu.

The accommodation of several non-Vedic trends into the Hindu pantheon gave rise to the growth of the ideas of *avataras*. Any human who had spread a strong new faith and commanded a formidable following was considered as more than human, and imbibed with a divine spirit. Devotees did not hesitate to accept him as the Divine incarnated in a human or even animal or half animal form.

The Divine has many ways to manifest its power. In the eyes of the Divine there was no superior being, no inferior being. (This was, incidentally, a hard-core Jaina-Buddha idea.) In order to manifest Itself and come to the aid of the suffering masses, the Divine is willing to suffer and undergo all the tribulations of a life on the earth.

But this made an easy room for formal worship of the Divine in the shape of mortals, which was severely forbidden in the Buddhist canons. Any formal representation of the Divine was strictly forbidden. Yet the catastrophic change did take place. The Buddha and the Jainas had their temples too, along with representations of other deities like Tara, Ganesha, Marisha, Saraswati, Kubera, Varahi, etc.

This was not at all new against the antecedents of the Indian subcontinent. Centuries of Buddhist supremacy had familiarised the people with the ideas of the Jeenas, the Avataras, the special Gurus, and Bodhisattvas. These formal representations automatically suggested and demanded formal devotional worship.

Unwittingly but inevitably, this transformation was just a new-face Vedic sacrifice which the people, especially the priest, had been missing. The temptation of finding oneself at the head of community and attracting subjective and objective homage was too great to be given up altogether.

The Vedic *yajna* was in this clever way substituted by *pooja* (which is a new word in the Sanskrit dictionary, meaning offering prayers with water, flowers, lamps, incense and food, and which replaced butter, the more ancient offerings of wine and animal sacrifice); the Vedic *Hottaa* and *Advaryu* were replaced by *Guru* and *Tantradhaara*.

All in all it was a very big change, an entire sociological metamorphosis. New gods, new forms, new language, new prayers in completely new formats and dimensions made their stay permanent on the altars of cloisters and temples. Vedic times knew of no temples, nor of any altars. New temples and new gods began to crowd the land. A new brand of Brahmanism, complete with codified manuals for sacramental formats (*smriti-s* and *tantra sootra-s*) began to take shape. Buddhism found itself absorbed in the Hindu pantheon.

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The man who was responsible for driving out this kind of pluralism in Hindu spiritual thinking, who was responsible for clearing the atmosphere of the Buddhist canonizations by advocating in favour of meditation and self-search, and who pronounced that the Divine is One and only One, and that only One is the Self, was Swami Shankaracharya, a Brahman from Kerala in the south of India. It was he who is said to have knocked out the bases of the Buddhist canons and Buddhist institutions from India. He believed in and advocated for, the One and only one God, the Brahman, the Atman, the Self.

He replaced emphasis on the Buddhist advocacy with the *Sheelas*, i.e., moral discipline by yoga or physical and mental discipline in order to be able to meditate on the truth that the Self alone is the final truth, the cosmic reality. The knowledge of the real is the knowledge of the Brahman, the All-in-All, the Self, the *Atman*, the *Brahman*, the 'I' in us, and in all animates as well as all inanimates.

This meant slipping back to square one again, to the advocacy of the Upanishads and the Vedas. It negated the entire system of the anti-Vedic Jaina-Buddha models of worship of spiritual deities, represented in the shape of animals and humans.

Protests were heard from all sides. Capable teachers, pastmasters in debates and polemics stood in defiance of Shankara and his advocacy of the theory that 'I am the Brahman' (*Shlokaardhena pravakshyaami yaduktam sastra kotibhih/Brahma satyam Jagat-mithyaa; aham Brahmaiva naaparah*.) "In half a verse shall I state the truth propounded in a million of treatises: 'The world is an illusion; the Brahman alone is the only Real; I am none other than the Brahman.'"

The philosophic slogan 'I am He and no other' contained the results of a certain conduct of metaphysical process of argumentation. Realisation of the 'nature of the real,' i.e., of what is termed as God, through a process of deep meditation was recommended by this kind of approach to attain perfect peace, which was, at one time or another, the most treasured discipline of the highest, noblest and most consistent spiritualists.

Even in Persia and Arabia, where Islam had later fully established its sway, many devout and highly learned and respected saints endangered their lives by advocating this truth. Many met the death of martyrs by accepting the theory that 'the Real is within us,' expressed in the oft quoted slogan 'I am He' (*an-ul-haq*).

The metaphysical contention that the world is within the individual, that the macrocosm lies within the microcosm, that the 'I' is the Brahman, convinced many pious believers although the sharply contended and sensitively related metaphysical arguments did not always satisfy the fanatic doctrines of the diehards. Such sublimity of the ultimate truth, of the real, is attainable through pious meditation alone. Meditation involves a state of unperturbed mind.

Such spiritualists who have experienced the real, the *satyam*, *shivam*, *advaitam*, do not entertain either fear or temptation or passionate reactions to threats and provocations. Success does not fan their egos; frustration does not depress them.

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Between the fourth and eleventh centuries the mind of India was undergoing a deep change. Vedism was swept away forever by Buddhism and a severe reaction followed. It was, of course, a Brahmanical reaction when attempts were being made to reintroduce the Vedic sacrifices, or some parody of its ancient format.

This did not catch the imagination of the people fully. But it stood out as a new pattern of Hinduism. In imitation of the Sassanian, Babylonian, and the more recent Parthians, devotees in India too imaged gods and indulged in rituals. The people welcomed back priests and priestism which easily took over. The *stupa*-centred monk life and the Jataka ministrations were blown away by a new trend. Again, powerful Brahmanism brought back orthodoxy with all its divisive trends and dominating authoritarianism.

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The new India (seventh and eighth centuries) had come in touch with Islam. India has always been a fertile receptacle for absorbing and experimenting with different religious systems. But the Islamic experience, with its sword and fire policy, with its wide-ranged plunder and rape, followed by forcible mass conversions, proved to be a very rude shock.

As noted before, since the time of Alexander, India had come in touch with the Greek and the Parthian cultures. Their literature, science, well-carved images, and their elaborate temple institutions blew in trendish wind of neo-Brahmanism which was a complete anathema to the liberal canons of Buddhism. The new ideas known as Hinduism, the ways of the Sindhu-people (Sindhu-Hindu), formed a sad replica of the Babylonian and Persian groups of priests and their modes.

The neo-Brahmanism received support from the Gupta monarchs (4th, 5th, and 6th centuries) who reacted against the Buddhistic way of devotion and the swami way of lean, sparing pattern of spiritual living. This was the medieval period of India's spiritual history, a tantalizing negative history. Decadent Buddhism had degenerated into Tantricism, and what was the practical and social programming of the great Buddha degenerated into the cults of the common man. It was a period of decadence, decadence resulting from surfeit, excess, glut. It was a period when spells, necromancy, tribalism and Tantric orgies (all related to the ills of cold urbanism) were permitted to flourish once again. Together with the common man of the hills and woods, even the sophisticated indulged in the religions of the voluptuaries. Theatrical and dramatic stunts keep immature minds spellbound, and truth is easily bartered for a spell.

The common tribes and masses, once protected under the compassionate wings of Buddhism, again fell prey to a sense of insecurity. This led them to lean toward supernatural forces and cults which they thought would come to their assistance in moments of distress.

Not the hard ways of the metaphysical process nor the archaic sacrifices of the Vedas, but the simplistic ways of the discarded cults, of the mystifying Tantra, or blind devotion to particular powers and gods, held the common man in thrall. They desired to love God, and serve Him, but that kind of love was found to be a kind of aberration. It was not real spiritual love. It was a form of transferred sense of fear and nothing else. It was a distinct sign of degeneration, apathy and decadence.

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The teachings of the Buddha, we have seen, were challenged by those of Shankaracharya. He was a strict believer in the Vedic analysis of the divine real, and did not have any trade with any kind of personal God. He was a strict monist. He was the Indian Kant, a superbly pious individual sincerely devoted to the divine. But he was an uncompromising ardent non-conformist too. He rejected totally any commerce with any shade of a personal God. This was his interpretation of *Advaita* (monism).

For him there was only one God head and no other. How could such a man watch the country going berserk over personal devotional worship or temple worship, under the supervision of priestism?

His determined onslaught against the deists was based on purism, on the sharpest intellection based on reasonings and advocacy. Logic and reason formed his toughest armour. He moved up and down the land to meet all the prominent deists, and brought them under a monistic discipline. It was by this means that he wanted to combat the Tantric menace and recover the lost spiritual life of the people. No trade with devotion but logical analysis alone leading to a firm realization that the supreme truth was attainable through a meditative process alone. He propounded what is now celebrated as the *Vedanta* and *Advaita-vada* that is the philosophy of monism.

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The monist argument's most hair-splitting metaphysical stand lacked sadly the qualities of the heart. Buddhism, in comparison, touched the heart. It was a man-to-man approach. In Buddhist ministration man felt for man, life felt for life. God, or any ideation of god, never intervened in the process.

The monist argument, on the other hand, completely ignored the value of emotion in seeking God. It underrated the effusive and cleansing value of emotion, its creative and chastening properties in the difficult exercise of seeking God. God is love, love is God. Godless love is as dangerous and hazardous as loveless God which is the supreme ultimate reality of all realities. It cared more for personal salvation. The Buddha's whole life and action was dedicated to the removal of sorrow from personal and social life.

The pre-Buddhist radical Tantric way of devotion, which was dedicated to the great Mother in her personal aspect, also leaned on the emotional appeal in prayers. The 'reason-all' barren *Advaita*, or its puritanical monism, failed to inspire the confidence-chord in the hearts of the devotees.

A change was destined to come. The purist Brahmanical had to come down to the levels of the emotive plebeians, the outcasts, the pastoral multitude who belonged to the earth and earth alone. The dour and defiant *Advaita* monism referred to intellection. It advocated a *nirguna* or a spiritual identity without any qualitative or objective adjunct.

The plebeians of the earth hungered for some emotional content in religion, some *saguna* (qualitative) concept of god who could sport or grieve when required with the sporting or grieving spirit of the humans. The personal concept of the divine appealed to them more than the impersonal. They needed a tangible God rather than a metaphysical hypothesis.

The answer came from a Brahmin, Ramanuja (1017-1137 C.), whose intervention re-established the primeval Tantra-based form of devotional worship. A personal God formed the very basis of Ramanuja's concept of the God head. Devotion and devotion alone was advocated as the truest offering.

The format of devotional *bhakti* (a personal rapport between the Beloved and the Devoted), included the following nine active forms of participations: remembering Him in all actions; memorizing His names and acts; singing of Him; bowing to the Beloved Lord; forming a friendly rapport; offering worship to the Lord; decorating Him; getting closer and closer; and finally, to identify totally with the Lord so that there remains no vestige of difference between the Lord and the Self.

Nothing less than this would satisfy the demanding process of God-love. The basis of Ramanuja's total surrender in devotion did not, however, lack in polemical rationalization. Such total surrender of the Self-challenged the sharp intellection of the redoubtable Shankaracharya. By using an equally sharp analysis of the human mind and its greed for prayers and for submission to a higher force, Ramanuja at once captivated the devotee-instinct. The love of man for God, he contended, compelled the Divine to assume a *saguna* form, although in essence the Divine is *nirguna*. He declared, "The immaculate *Paramataaman* indeed is my *Narayana Rama*. I know they are not two. They are identical. Yet I must confess, *Rama*, the Lotus eyed, is my heart of hearts." (*Shreenaathe Jaanakinaathe abhedah Paramaatmani tathaapi mama sarvasva Raamah kamala-Lochanah.*)

The historic challenge of Ramanuja, which replaced the (Buddhist tinged) *Nirguna-Advaita* by *Saguna-Dvaita* succeeded in throwing India back to the pre-Buddhist times of folk-worship and devotion through prayers and songs, and through austerity and devotion. As if in a flood of reaction to the *Nirguna* concept there appeared successively a team of other redoubtable philosophers. All of them were dedicated to establishing a *personality of the God head*, as opposed to the chimera of monism, and its abstract view.

These saintly, scholarly devotees of the personal *saguna* God who helped to transform the mass of India, and who followed Ramanuja, one by one, succeeded in gathering a large following. These were the three master-scholars and saintly Godmen: Madhava, Nimbarka and Ballabhacharya.

Their approach reminded one of the primordial nature worship, devotion to Ma, and of Tantra and Tantric Buddhism. Under their devotional ministrations the mode of worshipping a personal God as was the mode in ancient traditional form of worship was re-established. The ancient Tantric folk forms of worship, with the powerful support of a regenerated Sanskrit language, reappeared in a very elaborate form which holds the Hindu mass in thrall even to this day. The *saguna* or personal divinity held its charm over the *nirguna* or the impersonal concept of God. Not reason but sentiment, not intellect but the heart established its claims on prayers.

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All over the country temples in the name of different gods were thrown up. Multitudes of devotees streamed in from far and near. Special holy days were marked in the calendar. Love for God, for a personal God, became the supreme expression of a devotee's spiritual dedication.

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Historians have traced a lot of this devotional fervour to foreign sources like Egypt, the Medes, Mesopotamia, Syria, even Persia, not to mention the Greeks. Baalism, Mithraism, Zorasthustraism with their formats of elaborate ritualisms and priestic forms did find responses in India. The 'Bhagavatas,' a name ascribed to their devotees, were first heard of during the dying days of the Greeks and the Parthians (3rd century BC). Learned treatises, emotionally moving songs and prayers, written both in Sanskrit and provincial languages, were composed to establish a new trend. Learned and saintly masters advocated a much simpler approach to God through love and devotion. *Bhakti*, or devotional love, they called it. It was a distinct religion of love.

XI

Bhakti was total love for a personalized God. It grew into a religion by itself and was eulogised as Bhakti-yoga. This new stream of thought contained the philosophy of the Bhagavatas. Bhakti-yoga, as it was called, expounded an all embracing philosophy which accepted and absorbed all kinds of lives as children of God.

The religion of love did not recognize any distinction among races, classes, castes, sexes, or species. It ignored social hierachy, brushed away all shortcomings, condoned all sins, and embraced god's creatures as brothers of the same family. It reminded one of the commiserations of a dedicated saint like Fra Lippo Lippi or St. Francis of Assisi.

Since the times of the Indo-Greek interlude (BC 4th century) various elements, foreign as well as native, of races and opinions, had opted for making India their permanent home. Western Asia and Egypt, Medes of the time, was undergoing a revolutionary change. Compared to the rocky wilds of the Grecian peninsular regions the harassed vagrants of Medes and Parthia found the land to be hospitable and accommodative, pleasant and profuse.

India welcomed the distressed and the famished but such migrations also brought with it many problems. To bring all of them to a common way of life was no easy task. From closed minds and senseless fanaticism to arrive and live under the pleasant religion of love and brotherhood was in no way an easy change.

Indeed it was a most difficult and complicated task to absorb all the different peoples within the community and accommodate the different ideologies. The many differing systems and opinions, different gods and different rituals, looked for a common nestling resort where they could get together, at least philosophically, and live peacefully thereafter.

Did not the Vedas propound an ideal of living together with the many? Did it not declare India to be a meeting ground for differing opinions? *Yatra vishwa bhavatyeka needam.* (Where nestles the entire universe?)

After the fretful and fevered centuries, the people of many lands looked for an embracing respite. They were eager to be moulded and coalesced into one people, one ideal and one love, in spite of the embarrassment of dealing with many gods.

But the magic crucible that nursed the philosophies of Vedism, Buddhism, Mithraism, Baalism, Tantricism, Vedantism and Love, which along the long march of history had also come across with faiths like Zoroastrianism, Mazdaism, Talmudits, Paganism, Judaism, Christianity, was suddenly confronted by an unaccommodative philosophy that brought along with it a host of controversies. India felt dazed under a gruesome military pressure—gruesome, unaccommadative, fanatic.

As long as the Islamic threat had not appeared on the horizon, as long as the tremendous pressure and bloddy challenge to life, honour and property was not imposed by the dreadful sword of Islam (meant to be a religion of peace), things and the pace of historical changes never crossed normal historical expectations. Down the irresistible flood of history, changes overtook the placid current of time. Those who came were adjudged, absorbed and fraternised. But the spirit of absorption and adjustment failed only against the tide of forcible conversion or total destruction, with no other choice left or granted.

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But with the advent of the new threat, new thinking began to crystallize. The religious India sounded a new bugle. It ushered a religion based on love and love alone. These were the Bhagavatas.

We hear of the Bhagavatas for the first time in the Puranas (a novel kind of religio-historical chronicling, very popular with the masses), of the medieval period and in the Mahabharata (of later recensions), especially in the Gita, and in one of the Upanishads—the Shvetashvetara Upanishad. As a system of religious love for all forms of lives through the love for God, Bhagavatism made its presence felt in the spiritual world of the Indian subcontinent (8th century).

A new compendium of scriptural literature overwhelmed the culture of Bhakti, religious love, which reminded one of the fervour of Mother-love as well as of the fading and faded teachings of the Buddha. This was Bhakti or the Bhagavata culture. It was a culture of love and accommodation, service and dedication, sacrifice and surrender.

According to this new philosophy, God could be approached as a friend, a provider, a master, a beloved constant companion and a witness, as the last but unfailing resort, and above all a selfless well-wisher. A new movement which had its antecedents rooted in tribal Tantra, Buddhism, and above all in the monistic view of Vedanta, and which opened its arms to the people of all beliefs and all classes, raged over the land of India from the Himalayas to the ocean. This was Bhakti, the religion of love. Of this we shall speak now.

XII

In tracing the history of the evolution of the *Bhakti* religion we have, in this article, attempted to trace man's simple desire to express his gratitude for the ample gifts he receives from the mystery that expresses through nature. This desire of his gradually turned his mind into a religious and ethical institution. Religion belongs to man but man belongs to nature. He who accepts nature as his religion is a man liberated. Somehow, like finding air, water, food and children, unasked for, like concomitants of the life process, man was compulsively urged to find out some power beyond, which (or who) though unseen, appeared to him as the paramount source. That mysterious source was his real lord and real provider. The wonderment that was life, they divined, had an antecedent, a source. To that unseen fountain of power and grace, man found it easy to kneel, thank and also pray. Self-preservation is at the root of true religion. From self-preservation to soul-preservation was just a step forward.

The origin of the God-sense most men so devoutly cling to lay in his feelings of gratitude, and also perhaps, unknown to him, in fear, fear of the unknown. In tracing the history of Bhaagavatism (the religion of love) in India from that stage to this, we had to pass through the various stages of early animism and pagan Tantra or the personal devotion to the Mother. But the most striking feature of this spiritual progress is that the man in India recognized his hunger in the soul, and never gave up the hunt for its satisfaction.

We have, in the course of our brief research, shown how the first agricultural people took the earth, the air, the seasons, the rains, as their true aids and friends. These they naturally accepted as their benefactors. To these they brought their prayers. They discovered the importance of the female in the phenomenon of procreating, multiplying (females, mind it, not sex or sex-power, which was by and large unknown to them). Paeans and paeans of heartful prayers were raised to the mysterious great Mother. Her special symbol of the triangle was adopted as a divine, God-given holy symbol, signifying the fountain-head of life, propagation, fertility.

While the Tantra form of native worship continued in the dark recesses of primitive and folk culture, the more sophisticated groups of the Vedics came up with their elaborate and aristocratic ritualistic forms of sacrifice, and their well-calculated division of mankind into several classes: acceptable and unacceptable; touchable and untouchable. This was a new thing, unknown and unacceptable to their communes. They resented the segregation.

We have seen how this segregation was challenged by Buddhism, and how the Vedic forms were finally set aside, and a religion of compassion and equality emerged. It was the time when the lower ranks in caste, other than the two higher castes, came to the forefront and seized political power. Vedism went into hiding and sacrifices were stopped. Brahmanism was pushed to a back seat. Soon, with the aids of new monarchies assuming political powers, and with a determined repression against the social outcasts, Vedism tried to come back but failed. The world had changed by that time. And in that post-Buddhist new era, none would hear of Vedic sacrifices again.

Brahmanism took a new shape. God was defined as the Brahman. An abstract, subjective impersonal form of meditation was recommended for personal salvation.

Accustomed to think in terms of the commune, this kind of personal thinking for personal elevation and salvation failed to catch public imagination.

Immediately the Brahmanic concept of 'salvation through meditation' was challenged. Worship was sectionalized into *nirguna* and *saguna*. This in its turn led to two divergent paths: one, a path to God through impersonal meditation; and two, another path through personal love. This latest religion of love was adored by the general mass. This became thereafter the abiding religious belief of the Hindus (as they were known by now) as well as the non-Hindus of India. The Tantra-based, classless Mother-centred exuberance of intimate love and dedication, coming in touch now with some foreign forms, Vaikhanasas in general, turned into the warm ardours of the Vaishnavas, adorers of the religion of love.

From the primitive communal prayers to the later religion of love (*Bhakti*), a constant stream of devotional urgency in the Indian life has been historically traced. The personal Gods of the Vedas and the complicated Vedic ceremonials gave way to communal and personalized prayers. The rigorous and class-conscious forms of prayers fell flat before the emotional appeals contained in the ethics of compassion and surrender.

The concept of any personal God flowed into two broad streams: the ancient matriarchal stream of Tantra, and the medieval patriarchal stream of Vaishnavism. We shall now try to elucidate the later stream. *Bhakti*, or personal devotion and dedication as a form of religion, is our subject of inquiry.

SMARANIKAA

I Remember

ROOPAM ROOPA VIVARJITASYA BHAVATO
DHYAANENA YAD KALPITAM
STUTYA-DIRVACHANEEYATAA-KHILAGUROH-R
DOOREEKRITAA YAN MAYAA
VYAAPITVAMCHA NIRAAKRITAM BHAGAVATO
YAT-TEERTHA YAATRAADINAA
KSHANTAVYAM JAGADEESHA TAD VIKALATAA
DOSHA TRAYAM MAT-KRITAM.

—VYASA

I know You have no shape or form, yet I have imagined your form from my personal divinations. I know that You cannot be described by words of mouth, yet I had the audacity to have composed so many prayers in Thy name, and thereby limited Thy quality of indescribability by using words (to describe You). I know that You are omnipresent and that You cover all space, and yet I have pointed out certain places as holier than others, and emphasized on (the holiness of) pilgrimages. May You, O Lord, forgive these three failings in me, committed due to my personal weakness.

1

A

LOVE: WHAT IT IS

with

SMARANIKAA

(Translated versions of Smaranikaa Prayers)
(see frontispiece)

1. FROM VYASA: I know You have no shape or form, yet I have imagined your form from my personal divinations. I know that You cannot be described by words of mouth, yet I had the audacity to have composed so many prayers in Thy name, and thereby limited Thy quality of indescribability by using words (to describe You). I know that You are omnipresent and that You cover all space, and yet I have pointed out certain places as holier than others, and emphasized on (the holiness of) pilgrimages. May You, O Lord, forgive these three failings in me, committed due to my personal weakness.

2. FROM RAMANUJA: I know that Rama and Vishnu are one and the same Paramaatman, Brahman, yet my 'All-in-All' is the lotus-eyed Rama, and Rama alone.

3. FROM SWAMI MADHUSOODANA SARASVATEE: Let them who may do so contemplate and meditate on the immanent and the quiet. These have brought their mind under control through meditation but my dear heart always runs unfettered towards that blue beauty who plays along

the banks of the (river) Kalindi, and bestows inner pleasure that soothes the mind.

4. FROM SHANKARACHARYA: I worship Thee and Thee alone O Shambhu, even as I keep myself busy in my daily life. It is Thou who art my soul. My mind is Thy consort, the Daughter of the Mountains, my breath Thy attendants. My body is Thy temple, all my sensuous joys are but joys dedicated to Thee. When I sleep, I go into Samadhi as when I go about my daily chores, I go circumbulating around your abode. Words I speak are but prayers to Thee. (In this way) whatever I do, howsoever I am engaged, all my actions are dedicated to Thee.

Chapter One

A

LOVE: WHAT IT IS

Love needs someone else to love.

Like day and night together making a full day, like the two eyes making a full sight, like the two lobes of the heart, or the lungs making a single throb, like two wings forming a single flight, it takes two to fulfil love in its total completeness.

As the Upanishads inform us, the Eternal One got tired of its Oneness, and sought after a second.

The One needed a second to fulfil His mission, the mission of creation. In creating all that was created, the first response that emerged was the creation of what we now call love. Love is the creative force. Love is life.

Naturally therefore love is not a single-centred mono-acting self-play. In selecting the one to be loved, man has to be extremely careful because love stands at the root of all enjoyments that life has to offer, and a life without joy is as dreary as hell.

All lives seek love and love seeks a partner.

All lives are inspired by this craving for love whereas in the animal world this love remains a temporary phenomenon. Because men know that in the animal world, as at the animal level, the expression of love remains a temporary phenomenon, man dreams of a life of permanent love so that he could feel himself a little superior and a little more advanced in the hierarchy of the living beings.

Man seeks love for all times all through his life. This constant search for the spirit of love makes man a naturally spiritual being which other animals are not. Animal love generally clings to the physical. Man alone experiences love as a spiritual and elevating drive.

Love is a redeemer. Man redeems himself from sheer animalism through the magic touch of love. Love and a respect for love, i.e. love for other lives, alone makes man a superior animal.

But it is this power of Love that is ignored most in Life although it is also the most sought after human response. Man calls it the response of the heart. It is so strong a motive force in human life that man has been keen to search for it. Man has been chasing its perfection all along his limited short span of life.

Often man is found straying from one to the other for the satisfaction of the love he so eagerly chases. He wanders from surface to surface, from body to body, little caring for the mind, little caring for the spirit behind the body. Passion is not mind. It is a deformity of the mind.

Naturally his search for love in its true and abiding spirit eludes him. He does not get what he seeks because he runs from body to body for that satisfaction which, alas, never comes from changing frequently the objects of love. True love indeed exudes the virtue of constancy. True love is constant. Man has to be constant to a chosen object in order to discover and appreciate the true nature of his love.

This however has proved quite baffling except in a very few cases. But even if constant love was found true in one case, it would prove that in spite of many pits and falls true love is attainable in life. To secure this constancy, man, instead of depending on the cultivation of his inner spirit, has framed laws to chain the errant wings of love. Man has improvised legally the system of monogamy as a guaranteed security against watching his much 'adored love to split.'

Monogamy as an ideal has escaped an artificial and superficial human society. Polygamy just registers this sad escapade of the poor hungry and famished human mind that is frantically searching after true love. Love moving from body to body does not earn a home. Man's hunting for love has turned man's mind to hunt for bodies, many bodies. Sexualism is but a perversion of this futile and baffling love quest.

Frustrated love drives man towards further steamy adventures. Failure in finding true and tranquil love makes him turn away from his distraught and lonely mind, and he seeks a hiding place behind indulgences in drinks, drugs and other self-destroying levers which invariably fail him in his search. Drugs rob him of mental steadiness and physical independence to think for himself. He does not find what he seeks.

Love is its own guide. Before a man experiences love, he has to learn and know the true nature of love.

He has to learn that body draws a limit when love desires to fly free into the realms of boundless limitless joy. Love seeks the joy of celestial freedom, the freedom of beatitude. What is limited cannot contain the unlimited. That is why the ancients in picturing love have provided it with a pair of wings. Love is free and love is for the free. Before we expect to enjoy love we have to feel free. But Love as we practise it, clips our wings, limits our freedom.

True, love alone awards freedom, *mukti*, which the sages sought in their meditation. Spiritual love liberates. When the one beloved envelopes all the universe, all actions, thoughts, aspiration and achievements, when the one beloved envelopes all that man wishes to be, the same beloved is seen in every object, every person, every moment, every hope.

Thus when the desired one, in spirit, is realized in all living as well as in not-so-living objects, then and only then is love matured. Matured love alone leads to liberation. Arjuna in the Gita saw many in the one and attained '*poorna-jnana*' or emancipation.

In fact, and psychologically speaking, much of our hunt for God is directed to the search for this peace, this tranquillity in an ocean of dangerous dancing desires. In God we seek love.

Without a feeling of total freedom there is no love. Love's freedom binds. It establishes a bond, a permanent and inviolable bond. Love keeps mind enraptured and entranced so that what had been a personal love expands into universal love. Love feels free in its bondage. Only the free could get a taste of true love, of God love. Love, when freed from desire, sensuous desire, carnal desire, is God.

We are wrong to suppose that love limits freedom, that love ensnares and binds. Love is undoubtedly an attachment. Yes, it could be so when this love is turned towards a surface love, a body love, an individualized and limited love. It is love mostly for possession, principally possession of a body, of an object, and that only for the time being. It does not run deep, does not stand firm. Life is temporary, possessiveness is more so. But love? Love is an eternal phenomenon, a universal phenomenon.

Love never dies, never falters, never recedes or fades. The entire universe, from the grains of sands and blades of grass to the stars and planets on high, is inspired and held together by the spirit of love. The balms of universal love sustain growth, redeem from decay the apparent phase of separation, disappearance and even death. Without the touch of love the cycling order known as life would appear barren and meaningless. Love dispels illusion, brings forth reality; and ennobles existence which is otherwise a slippery phenomenon.

Under the touch of true love, body appears to be a mischievous tempting chimera. But love is not. No body-love could become love for eternity though we poor mortals seek eternity in love. Love when turned towards body, or towards any possession, throws the snare around itself. The first catastrophe that takes place through this predicament is a loss of total freedom, love's most treasured property.

In trying to find love in a body we try for achieving the eternity of true love in the meagre embraces of some temporary stuff. But love is not to be found in the ephemeral physical containers.

Love is a reservoir of deep and secluded personal feelings charged with very rich and deep but exclusive emotional interplay. In the unknown currents and subcurrents of emotions, love has every chance of going astray. One who has the fullest control of his emotions has the enjoyment of the perfect and fulfilling feeling of love achieved. The toy-play of flimsy love drama ends up with frustration, plagued by a deeper hunger for further consummation. This has no limit and like a fathomless pit draws deeper and deeper into destruction.

Therefore the question that all true lovers must ask of themselves is how to achieve this full control of emotions so that one can fully enjoy this wondrous many-splendoured gift and man's most sought for emotion, love.

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Often this love is mistakenly viewed as sex and sex acts, sex perversions. Sex is an instinctive urge for reproduction and reproduction alone. It is nature's greatest aid for mating to multiply the species. For good or bad (barring a very few) all living species have been divided into two sexes, the male and the female. None can reproduce without the other. When the time comes, one of these seeks the other and plants the seed of production into the other who bears the natural receptacle to preserve the seed and let it grow. The planter is the male and the receiver is the female. The urge to unite for the purpose of reproduction and thereby fulfil nature's programme of multiplying the particular species is both natural and instinctive.

The more intelligent the species, the *less* is the number of the reproduced. The less intelligent the species, proportionally *higher* is the number of lives reproduced.

The power of intelligence varies from species to species. Man is the most intelligent animal and the single celled amoeba is the least intelligent. Lives less intelligent are driven by the force of what is called instinct. In man alone instinct is further strengthened and refined by intelligence, which in the Vedas has been called *chit-shakti* or consciousness. (*Chiti-roopena yaa kritsnam etat vyaapya sthitaa jagat-Chandee.*) We are explaining this because at a later stage we shall have to show that it is foolish, it is indeed going against the plans of nature, to go by instinct alone when intelligence is available.

For intelligent animals it is necessary to go by intelligence alone. Intelligence as a power ultimately, through practice and discipline, secures a firm grip over instinct, and ably puts itself to the uses of society. The more intelligence is applied correctly, the more refined and sharp it becomes. Civilization is a process of intelligence securing a grip over instincts or of *buddhi* over *pravritti*. When intelligent animals like Man act as servants of instincts alone, intelligence gets dulled which is a great loss. Loss of intelligence in preference to instinct is the loss of the special privilege that has been granted to man. Man thereby misses the one distinction that separates man from other species.

The more intelligence is put to use, the sharper it grows. The less it is applied, the duller it becomes. Like an armour, intelligence must be kept in use so that it retains its shine and usefulness. Amongst men the more intelligent are considered to be of a higher type, and the less intelligent are considered lower. It is foolish to squander away the valued gift of intelligence in preference to instinct.

Like a knife intelligence gets sharpened by more and more use and more and more care. It gets duller and duller by misuse or disuse. With this kind of acquired dullness, man earns gradual degradation from his nature-awarded, nature-gifted special ranking and gets exiled into the lower rankings of less intelligent species. In the Bible the pair of human species acted on the drives of instinct. Consequently they were made to lose their heavenly rank of immortality and then exiled into the regions of mortality. Although given in the form of a legend, this was a scientific fact stated as a parable.

Man must never be victimized by the unthinking influence of instinct. Instinct like intelligence is a great aid to the development of life. But man must use it after gaining a complete disciplinary training from abler guidance.

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The work for which man and his life was designed reaches perfection only through a course of proper discipline and guidance. This discipline is technically called yoga which means acquiring skill in the actual conduct of life. It is wrongly supposed to be a discipline for the recluse, the abdicated. The yogic discipline is designed to lead the man of the world along the path which alone can give him the gift of the fullness of happiness.

In fact the philosophy of the yoga system trains man to enjoy fully the fruits of life, acting through a properly conducted and rigorously practiced training. Its aim is to lead life to its most enjoyable consummation and gain in the end a state of perfect peace and tranquillity.

It is obvious therefore that it is the first duty of man to cultivate his intelligence and get a hold over the passionate urges of instincts. Animals of lower order act by instinct. Intelligence, overcoming instinct, proportionally upgrades a living species or even an individual.

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Sex being an instinct, an individual's spiritual salvation is subtly linked with the degree of control a man can exert on his wayward wishes, desires. Through yogic practices and discipline man can arouse his latent powers of will and subdue the flying whiffs of wishes. When wish is turned into will, the animal in man attains the fullness of his potentials. Will-power adds dynamism and meaningfulness to the power and conduct of love power. A man in search of spiritual joy must discover and apply intelligent ways to utilize the great sex power and mate when mating is wanted as nature had planned to do. This entirely depends on the controls over his will-power.

Instead, most men play games with this instinct. They squander away the immense power stored within the creative instinct of sex. The ancients held this power in great reverence. They specially cultivated, even worshipped it. It was known and revered as the power of the *kundalini* (the serpent power). By squandering the potential gifts of this power the profligates make a mockery of this blessing that nature has gifted to the humans and all other lives. Sex power is essentially a creative power, not merely procreative. It is very necessary and useful to bear this observation in mind.

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Because of thoughtless misuse of this great power man is paying a great price. Man is staking humanity's future due to his personal failings and indiscretions. This is a terrible situation. Due to the unrestricted misuse of this dynamic power the entire human world has been thrown into a state of unbearable degradation and absolute misery. For his own transgressions of the natural laws the world around, man is suffering in various ways. The menace of overpopulation is just one of them. Destruction and pollution of nature in a large scale interferes with environmental equilibrium.

Indulgence has to pay a price. Personal discipline is the answer. But a still graver danger awaits man around the corner.

Such indiscriminate misuse of the sex power, known also as the serpent power or the power of the *kundalini*, threatens the very intelligence of man. He is considered to be the most upgraded of nature's creatures because he is the singular custodian of this great power.

Indiscriminate uses of the sex power has let loose a series of social crimes but the greatest crime man has done affects his ownself. By going freely for the indiscriminate and unbridled consummation of lascivious sex man has subjected himself to various types of mental and psychological ailments, and the number of mentally sick people is increasing by leaps and bounds. Psychiatrists are trying to repair the situation but the real healing lies in unraveling the mysteries of the *kundalini*, the serpent power. No psychiatrist seriously tries to locate exactly how mind gets out of hand and why.

In that old parable from the Bible which we have just referred to, sex urge was mistaken for love. Sex is a tremendous power, inevitably planted within the mind of man and irresistible in its functional ways. Yet here lies a remedy. Love is the sublimated form of the sexual drive. Love cares; love restrains; love makes sacrifices and elevates.

Both sex and love create. Both enjoy the rare power of creativeness in many forms. Art, music, literature, science, inventions, sports, all that man cultivates for culture depend on the mysteries of the sex power.

Every kind of creative production, every piece of addition to the knowledge and joys of man is an expression of the great sex power. It is called in Sanskrit *lhadini-shakti* or the revels of the *kula-kundalini* (the dances of the serpent power) which creates, inspires, and spreads joy, and justifies the sufferings of the sordid mortal coil.

Man cannot (and should not) avoid or underrate the power of sex. But man cannot afford going berserk or frenzied over sex drive and misuse this power due to a freak session of temporary madness.

To be oblivious of the dynamism of this sleeping power and use it without brakes or restraints, is to invite alarming and portentous disasters to self, family and society. It is like driving a sports car full speed through a market, indulge in fireworks in a petrol *godown*, or pushing the hand in a basket filled with live cobras.

Instincts like sex, in order to be fully utilized, have to be controlled and sublimated in the form of sex or love. Love seeks a mate. Even the One, the mystical *Purusha* in the Veda, sought for a second, for a mate. Love is stimulated and magnified when it finds a true friend and partner, a colleague and sensitive complementary. Love searches for a complementary self, which by effecting a union brings the self-search for a missing complement to a divine and ethereal end. The search never ends till it is found. If love is God, then this God must be found through love and love alone.

The mysterious magic of this sex (*kundalini*) drive makes a poet search for expressions, an artist bring out life and inspiration from a piece of canvas or a slab of stone. A musician creates a symphony from a violin, a piano, a flute, and a determined soul realizes the maximum of his voluptuous consummation of loving a peaceful communion. Behind all drives and all fulfillments of self's intimate expression, this serpent power swings its hood in a drunken self-merged state. It is necessary and vital to recognize and tame this natural drive in order to derive its maximum benefit. Repression is a demonic process and shatters mental equilibrium. Offer the Lady of the Serpent the best expression of a delightful union.

Love in order to be love inspires a person to almost madness when he appears to float alone on a rough and tumble sea by cutting all his moorings from reality. The frantic lover searches through, heaven and hell, scours through multitudes of temptations and pitfalls to discover his *alter ego*. His devotion to something afar never comes to realization. He fails. He finds out to his dismay that what he had sought for has escaped him. He stared as a beggar and ultimately he finished as a beggar. His sensuous ardour has neither been reciprocated nor consummated.

Why is this? What lies at the root of this predicament? Love is the most delicate feeling in the human heart. Its nature, when not understood, appears to be both ephemeral and abiding. In most cases it escapes the grasp, either due to misplaced confidence or due to age-worn disabilities. The result is a tragic failure. We seek love but cannot contain it. It escapes grasp. It leaves the seeker exhausted and empty, perverted and cynical.

The reason is not far to seek. Love is by nature the highest ideal of human heart. It is a longing that spreads out its tentacles from the moment life descends on earth. The baby loves the mother, and the love melts into the form of the milk that the mother pours in order to tend a newly sprouting life. It is an entirely natural phenomenon. No one can account for the food that nature's anticipations keep in store even before a new life descends. Love that flows from heart to heart makes the two bodies meet and crystallize into a completely new life. It is love that binds, love that maintains, love that provides, and love that is consummated when the toothless gums bite the tender nipple.

Love has no home except in the human heart. Chimera-like, love is ever-flitting. Once an unblest star-crossed doomed soul gets enraptured by the lure of love's sirens, Ulysses-like, it pledges to go for it and hopes to capture it. He is then doomed, done for. He then cares for no home, no comfort, no respite. He chases and ever chases and grumbles against not being able to attain that which has been his soul's quest. Like the knight-at-arms in Keats' poem "La Belle Dame sans Merci", or the Lady of the Song of Solomon in the Bible, he seeks love but he finds it not. Why not? Lady of Shallot? Her mirror? Her doom?

The shrine of love is built on a crystal tower far out of the reach of the sensuous. The source of all pain lies in clapping a contact between things around us, i.e. the objects which are transient, and the soul within which is eternal. Attachment with things outside causes desire, and desire by nature is insatiable, misleading and confusing. "Therefore," continues the Gita, "love Me and Me alone, the Soul, the Lord, where alone true Love attains its goal; since it is not attached to things and objects outside the periphery of the inner Soul."

Love is unattainable through the senses. Love belongs to an abstract feeling, incomprehensible, inexplicable and too intimate to be fully described. It fails ultimately because it expresses itself through a medium which itself is ephemeral. But love, i.e. the spirit of love is abiding, eternal and closely clinging. Once felt, there is no escape from its powers.

To try to contain an imperishable feeling within a perishable container (like a human body) is a primary blunder. The essence of love is too abiding and too tender to be secured in the ever-changing stuff known as the human. To secure the feeling of undying love, soul has to love an imperishable ideation. To place love at the door of a temporary shelter is a folly. This is indeed an illusion from which escape is almost impossible in the human world. Yet an escape has to be found. Love divine is worth this trouble.

Human efforts to find an easier means to love the eternal, the abiding, the unlimited, the everlasting discovered finally the truth of attaining the Self. This, the humans found out, is that hidden power which is the only source of life and of the life drama.

Any sensible person who observes minutely how a life comes into a body cast into another body, how the life germ progresses moment by moment, and how it gradually descends on the earth, any one who has studied and observed this wondrous, well-planned, unfailingly automatic mechanism, cannot but be convinced of the planned engineering skill of some super mind which lays down all the rules and logs in this phenomenal drama. That super mind knows no failure, admits of no mistake, and is always ready to accept responsibility for its own actions.

All that life and body really need, like air, heat, water, food and above all the very life force, *chaitanya* (consciousness) and the urge to be and to grow, comes from a source which has remained so far a factor of conjecture. 'The sublime hypothesis' they call it. Hypothesis it may be but it is undoubtedly a power. Finding no other answer, no other escape to these inescapable and observed facts, man called it unseen power, God (*Brahman*), the designing dynamism. All was life (*prana*) and life was *Brahman*, God.

Wiser men wanted to love this God. It appears to be a hypothesis but a wondrous hypothesis that has a mind of its own, a system of its own, a law of its own. Even as a hypothesis it is so real. This mind, of which we are speaking, is eternal, unfailing, accurate, well-ordered and perpetually alert. This intangible but alert hypothesis was named God. God is the *Rita*, Ahura-Mazda, the rein-handed Varuna, Mithra.

The Talmud says God has no name. The Vedas say He suffers no representation, His glories stand as His name. But the greatest fact is that He is. He is perceptible in his *Rita*, in his infallible laws. God is the only eternal concept. All other things are ephemeral, changing, perishing. Eternity is God. *Mahakala* (cosmic Time) is God. The time-concept is the beginning, the middle and the finality of God. The phenomenon of time gradually withdraws all created things back into the Source from where a body, an object, originally had shaped into a form and entered the whirlpool, the merry-go-round of world and time.

So the God we are trying to conceive has an aspect of putting life and a general lifespan to all material forms, and also of withdrawing life back into the flux again. Matter remains matter, and the life force is absorbed into energy. The two forces do not run parallel. Indeed they run concurrently, simultaneously, so that viewed against the perspective of time, comings and goings are inherent principles of the same process much as an undulating pendulum in a clock. Aspects of a single central process are in the philosophy of time's merry-go-round comings and goings. To see and regard them as two aspects is a mental delusion. To accept them as just one complete process is to accept the wholeness of God.

Behind the process all was a mystery; all is still a mystery; and it will remain a mystery.

The primary origin of the creative process having remained a mystery, man called it *shakti*, power, Mother God. Mystery though it was and continues to be, nevertheless, it has demanded from man his highest and sublimest homage. This process, so well sought and so dearly guarded, was and still is feared and loved for its inherent properties of inevitability, obduracy and inaccessibility. This awesome power demanded all the homage from the confused mind of man. He knew that his love mission would remain unfulfilled without forging a contact with, and the blessings from, this intractable power.The only way to fraternize with it and come close to it was to love it and call it God and kneel before it for blessings.

At this point we go back to what we had referred to before. If we have to bring Love to this unknown, unseen but eternal inevitable power, how do we go about it? Is 'He' only an idea? Is He real? Is He ideal? Is He only a conclusion of a syllogism? Is He tangible? How could we ever love an intangible ideal or an idea?

Helplessly baffled, we get relieved by admitting this power to be God. We bring him homage; ask favours from him in distress; and forget him when we have finished with him. Very few, indeed very few, blessed souls keep God nearest their heart for all the times, in fair weather or foul. This unseen, unlocated omnipotent power by virtue of the properties that it contains has got to be eternal, without a second, all-embracing, infinite, immanent, transcendental, sublime and omnipotent. He has to be what the Vedas divine as the *Brahman*, the Soul of souls, the all-pervading Principle inspiring creativity. The Vedas call him also *Atman*, the Self, as well as *Atman*, the Spirit; all that is good, conscious and blissful.

But how could man love an idea? Love, we must recall, needs a second to love. The Vedas say that even the One (Brahman) wished for a second, a partner, in order to love. Love demands the quality of tangibility. The intangible cannot be loved. Neither can the intangible love. For the act of loving the subject and the object, the loving one, as well as the beloved, both should be necessarily qualified or tangible.

Hence when the Vedantists said that the Brahman or God as they divined it, by calling it *Ishwara,* is impersonal and ephemeral, universal and omnipotent, we hesitate to disagree with it because of its almost perfect logic.

But how could one love an impersonal ideation when the very basis of love is a form? There is but one and only one way to do so. What is that way? Here we propose to go back to what we have been speaking of about the evolution of the divine form in the ancient tribal Tantra.

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'Tantra' is a Brahmanical word, expressed in a Brahmanical language. The tribes, to whom this system of worship belongs, spoke and wrote no Sanskrit. The Brahmanical word Tantra only denotes 'a yarn coming out of a flux,' i.e. 'coming out of the unknown'. So by tantra we could safely mean a traditional form of worship, the genesis of which nobody knows with certainty. It was never Brahmanical in origin although later Brahmans have worked a great deal to give it a Brahmanical form and spirit.

In the Vedic form of worship many gods representing aspects of nature have been evoked and praised. Offerings have been made to seek their blessings. Yet traditionally the Vedas preached a monistic idea and loudly protested that 'the Real is One although high souled Brahmans call Him by many names.'

After the Vedic times came the realists, the Buddhists, who did not believe in the Vedas at all. Neither did they have any truck with the many gods of the Vedas. Buddhist rejection of all God idea and acceptance of the powers of real knowledge (*bodhi*) insisted on the discipline of service to life and mankind.

We have also seen how this ungodly society, for want of a strong faith, for want of an emotional base in religious fervours, degenerated into a thousand forms of ritualistic tribalism from which the Brahmanical resurgence led by Shankaracharya saved the country and its confused spiritual life, and cleansed it of its highly degenerated social implication. We have also seen that Shankara's God, the Immanent, failed to capture the emotional demands of the multitude which wanted to have a god that they could love, as they once loved the Mother. Now Shankara said, "I am the Brahman", "I am He", "I am the formed representation of Shiva, the Real, the Conscious, and the Blissful."

All these high flown explanations which described the god that Shankara was trying to establish went over the head of the multitude who now confusedly kept swinging between the new idea and their old and ancient faith in the Mother and the powers of the *Shakti*.

This popular demand was satisfied by the studied arguments of the four Acharyas who replaced Shankara's *nirguna* or unqualified concept of the godhead with the *saguna* or the qualified concept of God.

This latter qualified concept fitted the imagination of the multitude. They poured their souls out in prayer to this God whom they could love and in return be loved by Him. The eternal and primal Mother came to her own, and the Tantric stream carried with it the great Vaishnava stream of devotion. This was an age (630-850) when the emotional aspect of prayers superseded the highly intellectual and rational polemics. In other words, the revival of the primordial ancient form of prayers reappeared in full glory. The tradition of the Mother came to the forefront. The Mother's family complete with children, spouse and attendants, occupied the altars all over the place. Thus appeared many gods and goddesses—Shiva, Ganesh, Kartikeya, Lakshmi, Saraswati and even their pets, serpents, lions, owls, swans, peacocks, etc.

The forgotten non-Vedic forms of worship reappeared clothed in Brahmanical garbs. Love or devotion sustained the effusion although the Vedas said "*...na tasya pratima asti yasya nama mahad yashah.*" The Vedas disapproved of image and of emotion-based prayers.

The revival inspired many folk legends, folk tales, songs and dances which formed around the resurrection. A stream of this emotional upsurge, together with a flood of sustaining literature, overwhelmed the land from the northern Himalayas to the southern seas. The rigid dour Vedic intellection was flooded over by the folk-inspired Tantric exuberance and festivities. The joy of life took over from the penance-scared austere Vedantism.

This religion of love and this loving attitude was known as Bhakti. Surrender, sacrifice, offering, sharing and total identification is inherent in Bhakti. Bhakti flowed through the thirsty masses as a new religion. This religion soon found its scriptural authorities. Two such treatises have been left to us by two of the most revered sages of old, Shandilya and Narada. The religion of love, and particularly the treatise of Narada on the reaches of love, divine love, follows this chapter. The chapter following thereafter will discuss later authorities such as Shandilya.

B

Narada Bhakti Sutra

The *Narada Bhakti Sutra,* philosophy of love, or divine devotion, grew into a separate religion in India. Many hesitate to call it a separate religion, but there is no hesitation. Love for God, or the Bhakti system, has grown into the most powerful religion amongst those who call themselves Hindu.

A society which had just come out of the dark mazes of a decadent Buddhistic nightmare of mysticism, ritualism and tribalism mixed up with magic and sorcery, soon adopted and gulped avidly the emotional content of the new trend. It was completely devoted to the divine in a personal form. It was clean, open, congregational and socialising. It loved, and accepted love.

To offer devotional worship to a personal God had already become the vogue in the later ages of Buddhism. Devotees of the Buddha had already learnt to accept the Buddha in images, which invariably projected the tranquil and loving mood of the great man. History really has no evidence of Hindu worship either in images, or in temples before this period of Buddhistic effusion (c. 4th century BC).

Worshipping the divine in a human form had come to be known to India in all probability through the Scythian and Parthian Greeks, who were Hellenic in their devotion.

Devotion to a personalised image, or devotion to God or Bhakti, had become a dominant religion in India, and the Vedic form of worship had to take a back seat until it was almost completely wiped away from the length and breadth of the subcontinent.

Worship called for a regularised format. Such formats could be given only by some experts. In most of the cases, the format was dictated by the Brahmin ministers of the ruling monarchs who found it profitable, and politically wiser, to build up a diplomatic relationship with the Brahmin community who continued to attract great spiritual power amongst the common mass.

The Brahmins exploited the situation. They knew that the bygone Vedic times, and the lost Brahmanical supremacy would never come back. Yet they realised within that the great Vedic culture, which contained the most brilliant spiritual truths mankind had ever come across, had to be preserved and practised for the good of mankind. The valuable culture of the Vedas could not be given up, or allowed to fritter away.

The Brahmanical thought process was not very incorrect. But in a society from which the Brahmanical dominance had been superseded by non-Brahmanical Buddhistic flocks, a comeback for Brahmanism was felt to be almost impossible without political support. This support came from the new forces which began to enter India from the North-western frontiers.

The wise Brahmins soon established political bonds with the new adventurers such as the Greeks, the Scythians, the Parthians, the Kushans, even with the Huns, who entered India and established new monarchies and empires. These became the new Kshatriya powers. Brahminical power joined forces with the rising Kshatriya power (4th century BC to 2nd century AD), although by the strictest Vedic standards, many of the ruling monarchs did not belong to the ancient Kshatriya blood. Adversity forces many compromises. A new form of religion came to the fore and was called Hinduism: 'the religious forms and beliefs of the land lying across the river Sindhu.'

These post-Greek Brahmins (c. 4th century BC) stood shoulder to shoulder with the rising imperial powers, and supported despotic laws with astute polemics of crafty lawgivers, with persuasive arguments and imagined or invented 'authentic' references (cf. the references Sage Vyasa had made in support of the marriage of Draupadi simultaneously with five brothers).

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The monarchical rules of the great Mauryas got, under the influence of Buddhism, tempered with the Buddhistic morals of *sheela, karunaa* and *titikshaa* (inner virtues of morals, compassion and spiritual abnegation). The society was fast losing its urge, vigour, manliness, along with the spirit of adventure and expansion under a negative outlook on life.

These spiritual as well as virile virtues, which had enabled India to stand firmly and decisively against the mighty onslaught of the Greeks and the Huns, gradually became legends. A sad degeneration of the manly and spiritual spirit of man set in due to the totally misunderstood and misapplied views of kindness and toleration.

Buddhism had become a make-believe hypocritical camouflage for carnal license and magic, vicious mysticism and superstition. In other words, the old traits of tribalism were trying to dominate man's spiritual as well as social rhythm of life.

It was an intolerable situation of godlessness, fraud, immoralities, hypocrisies, and downright license.

No society could take this for long. The Pharaohs, the Zarathustrians, the Romans, the Incas, the Mayas, great as they had been at their times, fell because of moral decay. A similar decay had overwhelmed the famed Vedic-Buddhist culture of the land of Bharata, or India. A stand against the degeneration had to be made. History demanded it, and time provided it.

The opposition came from the Brahmans, and was supported by the monarchs. The Brahmana and Kshatriya combine enforced a glorious Renaissance.

Tribalism and indiscriminate socialism and equalism as a dominating social trend was fated to die out because of the artificiality of its inner character. Ethical determinism did not support such immorality and vandalism within a social structure, or within its spiritual power.

The impeccable zeal and determination of the Brahmins stood in the breach. And with the assistance and support of the ruling powers, the courageous stand stood the grounds. The historical era of the Renaissance of neo-Hinduism had started.

It was the revived determination of Brahmanism which had helped monarchism to come to the fore, and establish itself as the new guiding power, instead of the degenerated power of the monks, which, under the pressure of its own immorality and evasive mysticisms, was far out and dying. New law books and compendia of social behaviour and norms, new literature and associated spiritual propaganda played in a cultural crisis their own parts. Brahmanism reasserted itself with re-doubled energy, vigour and thoroughness.

The historic Brahmanical resurgence had consolidated through a number of newly commandeered law books to suit the new Renaissance of Brahmanism.

In the ancient Vedic case divisions, no trace of touchability or untouchability was to be found. Classifying the innate nature and tendencies of man, and grouping them into sections was a very intellectual but natural as well as civilised process of educating the society. It was quite a sensible way of classifying and handing out special responsibilities. It was a cultural process of cultivation of inner basic talents.

This process was never meant to categorise gradations of man in his social standings as higher or lower. And above all, the characterisation was never meant to act as a stigma of social disabilities.

The Gita, an unchallengeable authority of the Hindu compendium, explains thoroughly this basic view of the original Vedic classification of the social man. So do the Upanishads, again and again without ever touching the odious flavour of untouchability. In the Upanishads, the concept of man as the *purusha* has been lauded with eloquent vivacity and vigour. Man as man was respected in the concept of society. These authentic scriptural evidences announced that the division so made, nonetheless, belongs to the same body, and admitted of no higher or lower social segregation. As in one single body, no higher or lower distinctions could be tenable, so neither in social or spiritual body could divisions take the place of classification.

The new slant of degrading sections of humanity living within the same social structure, i.e. the gruesome and despicable genotyping based on touchability and untouchability was most definitely a stratagem of neo-Brahmanism. It was activated by a reactionary insistence imposed by the materialist neo-Brahmins caught by the lures and temptations of the imperial power. (In certain cases, the Brahmins themselves usurped the crowns of monarchy through immoral and unsupportable means.)

From Chanakya in Chandragupta Maurya's time to the times of the Southern Empire of Vijayanagara, under the direction of the savants Vidyaranya and Sayana, Brahmins ruled the kings who ruled the people for about twelve centuries.

In its later phases, the Brahmins themselves acquired the imperial titles and generally speaking, during this period of Brahmanic dominance, what the Brahmins said formed the laws. Scores of law books were written. Within a short time, no less than twenty times the laws were revised and remodelled, but always and unfailingly, keeping the most rigorous control over the rise of the voiceless common man.

But who was this common man? Brahmins? No! The common man was he who lived by honest labour and independent crafts. Brahmins occupying themselves with handiwork, labour or hunting, especially building, engineering, repairing, or ploughing, were immediately demoted to the lower ranks of the *Shudras*. (cf. cases of Vishwakarman, Tvastaa and the Ashvins.)

In the *Neelapurana* of Kashmir, there is a story. Two peasant girls were starving to death with all their harvest safely collected. Still they were famished because no Brahmin came to them for inaugurating the first feast after harvest by sharing the freshly harvested food. Without offering the Brahmins a substantial share, farmers could not consume their own harvest even at the cost of starvation! (The joke of the story was reserved for what followed. The Brahmin who finally helped the girls ended up with marrying both of them!)

All these later Puranic (medieval chronicle-supported) rigours and discriminations had never been laid in the Vedas. These restrictions were the imposed lugubrations of the literature known as the Smritis and the Puranas. Of the new lawgivers, some of the more important ones were Yajnavakya, Sumanta, Jaimini, Javali and Devala. These names are specially mentioned because of the revolutionary reforms they advocated, which changed the very aspect and core of the Vedic society. In the fourth volume of *The Cultural Heritage of India* (Ramakrishna Mission Advaita Society), Dr Devala Mitra warns the diehards who refuse to admit of the momentous changes that had flooded the Indian life between 539 and 330 BC: "To refuse to take notice of the diverse and exotic elements in the Indian culture, and regard it as wholly, even mainly, the outcome of Vedism, or even the more eclectic Puranism, is to falsify history." Any attempt to falsify the recorded history is to ignore the basic homogeneity of the Indian culture, which Dr Mitra calls 'the product of absorbing forces that were in operation since the very dawn of history.'

Prior to the days of the Achamedian emperors, due to various surges of attacks from various Middle Eastern and Mediterranean powers, a steady exodus of people with their respective gods, priests and scriptures had taken shelter in the accommodative culture of India. In course of time, as they were absorbed within the Indian milieu with their gods, scriptures and even priests, the Indian religious life too became enriched by their rites, gods, scriptural truths and priests.

The most notable examples of such absorptions were the worship of the sun (Mihira, a powerful deity of the Middle East known as Mithra), whose temples were constructed in Taxila, Kashmir, and in distant Orissa. Similar 'foreign'deities are Varaha, Lakshmi and the prolific Goddess Ishtar as Tara.

The Maga priests of India remind us of the ancient Magi of Persia and Babylon. Such inroads forced India to adjust by editing its age-old law books.

Again and again, the tendentious law books had to be changed, presumably because the times and the local conditions demanded such frequent changes prompted by quick adjustments in the political dramas which reflect the uncertainty and ferocity of the period.

Even the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the two epics regarded all over Hindu India as holy texts, had their Southern and Northern recensions. The chronicles known as the Puranas, and held with the religious fervour by the mass, were written over a span of about six to eight hundred years, in many forms, in many recensions of the same anecdote.

All these despotic manoeuvering pointed out to one fact: that the society was changing fast, and Brahmanism was positioning itself to withstand the changes.

The universality of Buddhism, with its slogan of service to life, to man, was rejected with vehemence, and the social vice of untouchability stigmatised the entire community with an indelible disgrace. Even those who had been relegated to the abominable lower castes, acting under the influence of their superior brother, proposed their own communal subdivisions and sublaws, more strict and more binding even today. The lower castes thought that the more the rigour, the more the restrictions, the higher do they climb in the status of communal respectability.

These restrictions, so they thought, and still think, increase the hold of the chief of the community over the commune, and proportionately increase his status. Today, as it stands, it is much more difficult to eradicate the system from these lower kinds than from the higher ranks.

It must be borne in mind by every history student studying the history of the Hindu society that the concept of the modern day caste was never the intention of the Vedic system, when Brahmanas were free to fraternise with non-Brahmins. They often propagated and legitimised their children from any caste without restrictions. Such mixed-up cross births were accepted by society, and their paternality or ancestral purity of communal or racial antecedents were respected. [The obnoxious Anuloma and Viloma distinctions were yet another monument of Brahmanical obduracy. Higher Brahmanical ethics cut through these aberrations. Cf. Satyakama.]

All that we now know as the Hindu society was the gift of this post-Buddhist Reformation and Renaissance, when Buddhism was on its way out, and Brahmanism was determinedly setting in with its ramifications of the strictures, and land laws. These protected the Brahmanical interests alone, at the cost of 'the fifth rank' communities.

The words Hindu and Hinduism came in vogue during this period. It was a period of cataclysmic changes brought in by forces of moving history (c. 4th century BC to 14th century AD). Rigours of caste, neo-Hindusim, grew along with the plebeian Tantricism, which clearly cut through caste restrictions and elaborate Vedic rituals.

Worship of gods in the male forms was being carried out side by side with the worship of gods in their female aspect. In some cases, every male god was given a female consort, or *alter ego* as his special source of *shakti*. The rise of feminism characterised Tantra. In Vaishnavism, Radha's position was unshakeable, unalterable and inevitable. *Purusha* called for a *prakriti*. Brahmaa needed a *Saavitri* or Agni a *Swaahaa*.

This new trend of having plastic representations of honoured personalities like Mahavira, Buddha, Bodhisattvas and associated deities, and housing them in special buildings to be called *chaityas*, *stupas* or *vihaaras*, encouraged the neo-Hindus also to construct elaborate temples. (We sadly recall that the Buddha had foreseen this degeneration of the purity of *dharma* through worship of images, and strictly forbade any of his statues, even memorials on relics, to be erected.)

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The waves of immigration from the west of India had been going on for some centuries. From Egypt and Eastern Mediterranean to the very borders of Persia and Bactria, great cultures rose and fell, leaving behind a string of extremely rich heritage of religious forms and practices supported by vast literatures on forms and rites.

Under pressure from attacks after attacks, the vast populace had to change its habitats and look for safer homes. These rises and falls of very dominant, impressive and popular religions continued over a couple of millennia and even more. In all kinds of historical upheavals, the inevitable price has to be paid by the helpless masses who are displaced, and who are on their constant move for finding new homes. Such camp followers were on the move from the West to the East to India (cf. recent exodus from Bosnia, Sudan, Palestine).

Thus came the Magis of Persia, the Zoroastrians, the Scythians, the Parthian Greeks, the worshippers of the cults of Marduk, Baal, Mithra, Astarte, Cebele, the Kushanas, the Mongolians, even the many faced people of the Medes from Asia Minor and Syria. These powerful cultures finally were uprooted and scattered by more powerful oppositions. The homeless refugee cultures from the Sumerians to the Huns and Parthians and Scythians finally assembled in India! And as they migrated, they brought their gods and their religious rites as spiritual refugees.

In imitation of these foreign forms, Indian religious forms too accepted and cultivated, for the first time, the novel cutlure of the powerful hegemony of priestism together with a trend of founding places of pilgrimages. A powerful priest-class sprang up, and held the unsuspecting mass of people in distress within its grip.

The Hindu lawgivers too in the course of time marked out special places as pilgrimage centres, and even sorted out special rivers, lakes, and confluences, special springs, waterfalls, peaks and caves as more holy than others. These were declared, like Delphos, Melos, Jerusalem, Ur, Babylon, Cairo, Ekabatana, etc., as holiest of the holies.

In fact, to mark out a place as holy actually became a Brahman-inspired vogue of this period of Brahmanical ecstasy and monarchical supremacy. We hear of this in all the Puranas, and in the Mahabharata (*Vanaparvam, Anushasana Parvam* and *Ashwamedhika Parvam* in particular). Actually, the old term Vaidics, which included the entire society as a whole, and which also signified the Aryans, when referring to a special brand of culture, was largely replaced by the word Hindu during this period. Hinduism as a nomenclature clung to the people who had been the rightful inheritors of the grand Vedic culture. It signified 'an accommodative religion that gives and takes.'

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We shall hereafter refer to the term Hindu in this changed connotation, in this special sense, in the sense of the regenerated Brahmanical priestism streaked with casteism, powerfully organised by written codes of conduct, and loaded heavily in favour of casteist discriminations.

After Buddhism had been toally effaced from the land of its birth, neo-Brahmanism, under powerful royal patronage, took over, and the society was broken into pieces through the introduction of open and wide discrimination through castes and sub-castes.

Two other moulds of religious persuasion replaced the ancient Vedic and Buddhistic faiths. One of them was Tantricism: faith in the ways of the ancient system of communes or the tribals, and collectively known as Tantra, or traditional system of prayers. In the Tantra way, devouts resumed fervently the ancient worship of the Mother.

The other was called Vaishnavism (the path of love) in which God, the immanent, the impersonal and ideal, was conceived as a personal revelation, an advent who, in His unfathomable grace, wished to assume form, shedding off His immanent nature, and accepting a closer relationship as friend, relative, guide, Lord or Swamin. As the Gita says: *Gati-r-bhartaa prabhuh saakshee nivaasah sharanam suhrit.*

The Mahabharata and the Gita offered the most effective support to this aspect of personalisation of God, and the eleventh chapter of the Gita remains its chief advocate and example for all times.

All the Puranas advocate this new aspect of a completely new religion. In order to accommodate the new concept and the structural changes of the new society, for over 400 years, not only were the Puranas written but new Upanishads too came up and the epics—the Ramayana and the Mahabharata—underwent recensions after recensions. The Mahabharata itself extended from its original 100,000 verses (*shata-sahaasryaam sanhitaayaam*) to more than 400,000 verses!

From now on, love for God, devotion to God, service to God as a close friend of man became known as the Religion of Love or Bhakti, in which we find echoes of both Tantricism of old, and Buddhism of not so old a time.

2

SHREE-NAATHE JAANAKEE NAATHE
ABHEDAH PARAMAATMANI
TATHAAPI MAMA SARVASVAH
RAAMAH KAMALA-LOCHANAH

—RAAMAANUJA

I know that Rama and Vishnu are one and the same Paramaatman, Brahman, yet my 'All-in-All' is the lotus-eyed Rama, and Rama alone.

Chapter Two

BHAKTI AS NARADA EXPLAINS

I

Those who are familiar with the erudite wealth of the Indian Renaissance scholar, Vatsayana, and his contribution to Indian sociology will appreciate the point that the Indian mind relished diving deep into a problem for analysing the behaviour patterns of human reactions related to emotional changes. When he was analysing the reactions of libido, under human mind and its expressions, he deliberately dived deep into the sex syndrome, and exposed all its aspects in every detail without flinching at the sensitivity of the subject. In the process, he became one of the earliest scholars to treat the human mind in all its layers. Psychology in India was a deeply studied enquiry.

This kind of scholarly thoroughness has characterised the writings of the ancient Indian writers, who closely avoided speaking of any subject cursorily or desultorily. Abstraction and subjectivity, together, have been a noted characteristic of their treatment of a subject.

Love as a subject was no exception. It was always regarded as the prince of emotions. It not only binds life to life, but it also brings life to a stage of ethereal ecstasy.

It is a common experience that, life for its fulfilment, has to depend on a mutually reciprocative response which brings the distant near, and reveals new truths through new experiences.

Without that kind of reciprocation, each individual life would orbit around the dreary unfathomed region of the mysterious unknown, and throw the living process in a multitude of confusion. It is an unbearable experience to watch life spinning in Space without character, and in Time without any landmark. It would be a dreary living.

In order to endow this life process with some kind of significance, the factor of love has been found essential. Love is not only unavoidable in life, but it is also in essence vital to life.

When love fritters away its ethereal power through indiscriminate passion and carnality, the sage mourns to watch a divine gift getting wasted through indiscrimination, misadventure and avoidable peril, like a rudderless boat in a stormy sea.

True love is rendered divine not by attaching itself to any imagined god in brass, wood, or stone, but by attaching itself to, by concerning itself with the life around in wood, birds, insects, and children; in mounds and hills, lakes and groves, fountains and waterfalls. Life has to adore life before learning to love it. Love that does not care for the sublime 'sermon of life' and the living is no better than a dissipating vulgar licence which breeds sensuality and smoulders within the ever slowly decaying flesh.

Love is spirit, and loving is spiritual. Love is eternal and the essential aspect of the living joy of life. Spirituality lends a special meaning to love.

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In the English language, the word love has been so much vulgarised that to expect it to mean *bhakti* would be expecting too much from the usual common feeling that the word love would project. Material objects, money, power, human body, sensuous licenses—the dangerous and enticing aberrations to which love, the word, has been associated and used—has nothing whatsoever to do with real love or *bhakti*.

In order to realise the true nature of love and to cultivate it as it was meant to be cultivated, we must educate ourselves, especially our mind, to love objects of eternal value, and ideas that reflect timelessness. The sky and its beauty on a starry night, its fury on a stormy day, or its love on a dewy morning sunrise are scenes of eternal value. A bird chirping in a hidden bower, the squirrel running along the poplar trunk, the finch on the sycamore, the cuckoo unseen but filling the dale with ethereal music, the dancing waves breaking on the shingles, children playing, puppies frisking, girls moving with their parasols on, and a hundred other scenes as gifts from life are unpaid for love spots on which an observant mind feeds and feeds, without ever being satiated. This is love, the eternal appeal of love that prepares the ground for Bhakti.

In order to realise the true nature of love, and to cultivate it as it was meant to be cultivated, we must educate ourselves, especially our minds, to love objects of eternal value, ideas which reflect timelessness: eternity, dreams and images which evoke a sense of timelessness or a sense of the real. Death cannot overcome, nor decay can influence, this priceless subjective experience.

To love, to have to love that which is palpably ephemeral, or that which must inevitably and inexorably disappear and decay according to rules and law, is to court sorrow and bereavement. It is suicidal to fall into that trap. Wise minds avoid this dangerous process, and engage themselves to fastening their love to what has been described in the Upanishads as '*akaayam abranam asnaaviram shuddham apaapaviddham*'; that which has been referred to as '*ajo nityah shaashvatoyam puraanah na hanyate hanyamaane sharire*.'

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The wise men of the ancient East who had discovered and found the key to eternal happiness in mortal life defined love and devotion in terms of being 'attached to the pure abstract which has neither a body, nor any impure ephemerality in it; which is pure and unblemished.' They conceived of the undecaying reality of the world phenomenon as 'unborn, unperturbable, eternal and ancient. Time has no effect on it even though the body be consumed by Time.'

Finding it hard to grasp this? Any doubts? This is a fact actually realised by many. Yes, that may be love, ephemeral as it may sound.

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But this kind of love does not bloom without faith, devotion and submission. The total effect of this kind of devotedness is complete identity of tastes, interest and even essentials of personality.

Thus the word *bhakti*, which connotes all these features of total identity through total submission, finds no word in the English diction. Hence the necessity of explaining it.

Bhakti's essence, like love's, is realised through the pangs of separation, or *viraha*, awayness in spirit, form, depth and dimensions. "I`m here and you are there, and a hundred miles between."

The character of this love or *bhakti* is essentially so delicate and complex at the same time that its emotional aspect demands careful analysis. It could be done in two ways: one, by intellectual circumspection, by dissecting all its aspects, or two, by analysing its emotional content.

The Indian sages have gone through both processes. The intellectual study of the aspects of love or *bhakti* has been done by many sages in so many treatises, and through so many wonderful legends.

The volume of the Bhakti literature is too large to be even mentioned briefly. But our study of Bhakti would remain incomplete without referring to two popular manuals: (1) the *Bhakti Sootras* of Narada, and (2) the *Bhakti Sootras* of Shandilya. We shall try to refer to these *sootras* or aphoristic writings.

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Was Narada a historically tenable personality? Was Jesus one? Or Mithra? There is nothing materially incontrovertible to prove for all times that they existed in flesh and blood. Yet each of these made history. Since they made history, history owes to them. Some are born to make history, some to write them, some to convert, some to controvert. Yet some to devoutly reach and follow profound instructions left by them. Who wrote the Bible? When? Why? Such questions are unending. Faith pulsates with positivism, whereas sheer scholarship bristles with doubt, incredulity and perennial interrogations.

Narada, like Moses and Homer, in spite of their undying reputation, has remained an enigma to history and an epoch maker to faith.

Take for instance the simple word *love*. We feel we all understand this word and its implications. That this word demands to a great extent our devotional dedication to the object of love is often ignored. Even the mature generation proclaims patronisingly that loving is a temporary infatuating gland reaction, a chemical condition curable by the hard demands of real life. Do these cynical theorists ever stop to take into account why for such love a prince could leave his child, wife, kingdom and life of ease? Why and how a princess could opt for an unending pilgrimage to stark loneliness and non-identity? Or a blind man enrich poetry and literature with gems of feeling and human appeal? To such wisecracks, love appears to be totally made, and beyond logicality. Love for them is essentially chemical, glandular and/or libidinous. This is so because they ignore the spiritual context in reading love correctly.

How many would agree that one of the sublimest gifts of love is to build up in the human hearts the bonds of spirituality and faith? Even threats such as bereavement, failure, nay, even death, fail to disturb love's equanimity.

The worst enemy of impersonal love is self-esteem and pride, which is often another aspect of ego. And the worst victim of ego often regards love as an aberration of sex desires. Let this be cleared up here at once: that sex, far from being an aberration, a mentally formed hallucinatory greed, is the greatest, the strongest, the most fascinating gift from Mother Nature. Sex is ignored, avoided and looked down upon by the sinful, and by the mentally diseased alone. For the healthy and strong, for those who love life and its gifts, sex is a power to be cultivated, honoured and put to creative uses for spreading joy all around. No mother, be it bird, animal, or human, no tree, fruit, flower could take part in the Cosmic Phenomenon of Creation without the natural drive of sex, which is a beautiful expression of love. Of all the contributions of love to life, the sublimest is its contribution to the continuity of life.

The common parlance regarding love often disfigures its ideal purpose. Could one ignore the unchartered bondage between parents and children, friend and friend, between the self and the world outside? Ill-fated persons goaded by their unrestrained (and often wounded) ego cause injury to the function of love. This ego, the most cruel and diehard enemy of love's essence, can only be subdued, even effaced by the true spirit of love. Love demands dedication, devotion, submission, fellowship, reciprocation—all of which singly or combinedly help in keeping the degenerating acid of a wounded ego.

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We shall see how Narada analyses these issues, and ultimately proves thereby the merits of spiritual love. True *bhakti* or love cannot contain or entertain conflicts, suspicions, selfishness, greed or despondency. In the course of the free exercise of love, even the pangs of separation sublimate into blossoms of songs, poetry, identifications and total submission. No one has loved life more than a Hemingway, a Gauguin, a Mozart, a Steinbeck, or a Falstaff. By living the way they lived, they have blazed a progress which ever since has shown many the way how to live.

God is not for those who hate love. No hate could be too strong for the all cleaning power of love. No sin can be too blighting to withstand the balm of love that cleanses and cures. *Bhakti* is love: it is a kind of love through which a clay model demands the utmost sacrifice from one who loves it.

Our subject of enquiry is *Bhakti*. Bhakti denotes much more than love. It is both more comprehensive and dedicative. It is devotion and adoration combined. Objectively, it is idolatorously adoring, and adoring to the point of self-effacement. Self's identity is lost in *Bhakti*-love to the extent that the self and the non-self become one feeling, one throb, one identity. In Bhakti, reverence and familiarity, enjoyment and sacrifice become one.

This delicate tenderness of emotional approach to the subjectivity of the divine feeling has been fully described in the aphorisms of Narada, known as the *Narada Bhakti Sutra* (11th-12th century).

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We find for the first time Narada mentioned as a person in the Chhandogya Upanishad. He has been described as a master of all fine arts and an extremely sensitive soul. Yet he himself was bothered by the negative detractions of despondence, unfulfilment and even unpurposefulness. He often felt himself surrounded with gloom, though he was regarded as a very loving person spreading joy wherever he went.

Yet he was nagged with a kind of gloom, which he wanted to shake off. Finding no other way to do so, he approached the very ancient sage Sanatkumara who said, "The little cannot satisfy. The sense of total joy is a gift from realising the *bhoomaa*: the all in all, the total. God alone is total, undisturbed by fractional divisions. Realise that incorruptible totality. Get all fractional diversions merged into the One. Then alone joy will be yours."

Happiness is the result of fulfilment. The senses feel filled when cleansed of selfishness, greed, possessiveness, envy and anger. A sense of fulfilment is extremely difficult to achieve in life without decision to the will of God. To achieve this spirit of total dedication, one has to cultivate total love, total trust, total identity.

It is not easy to achieve this state of total dedication leading to total identity and final peace. For this, one has to exercise control over the senses, which are always running haywire due to the machinations of the dark forces and irresistible pulls which sense organs generate when confronted with the vanity of temptations. One is tempted only through a sense of want. The nature of want is that it cannot be satisfied. Those who miss the inherent truth in this warning are nothing but slaves held by a snare. They do not enjoy the most precious spirit in life, viz., absolute freedom of the self.

This is easy to say. To put this to practice requires a lot of severe mental controls through exercises of the mind. Of these exercises, a devoted sense of dedication is of supreme importance. Dedication, and then the joy in total sacrifice through identification. Narada also knew this, but he found it a difficult programme to achieve.

After years of penance, Narada realised the inner truth of what Sanatkumara was telling him. He realised that the underlying truth of Sanatkumara's ministrations could be realised through: (a) action unattached to selfishness; (b) devotion to the purpose to be achieved; (c) strength of conviction through a constant analytically sustainable process, and ultimately (d) establishing a contact with the supreme benefits of an unswerving meditation.

Narada continued to speak of his past life, and of how he had attained the perfection of love or *bhakti*. He recalled that his mother lived as a servant in a commune of great sages, and from childhood, he had imitated the ways of those sages. Through years of right-living, he attained a degree of inner purity, and one of the sages accepted him even as a Guru. He recalled that he became devoted to his Guru. This led him to Self-realisation. He tasted the gifts of total liberation.

"Then," Narada continued, "my mother died, and I took to the life of a wandering mendicant. While moving from place to place, once I found myself in a very peaceful surrounding where even birds did not feel to fear. I liked the place, and entered deeper and deeper in search of solitude. I found a very large tree with spreading branches, and decided to settle there. The place, the surroundings, the all-covering peace helped me in my meditation, and I realized that the true meaning of perfect peace was symbolised in the single syllable 'OM.'"

"My inner vision defined Time and its walls. I realised that one God lived as Spirit in all lives. In hills, the Spirit lived in rocks as hardness; in water as liquidity and taste; in air as odour and speed; in fire as heat and flame; in flowers as beauty; in all objects as a perpetual cycle of flourish as well as decay."

"I defied looking at death and birth as fractional terminals, and realised that death and birth are aspects of the irresistible continuity of the same life force. I felt I was one with the universal Spirit."

"I was a man of Spirit," he continued, "an entity of total sublime joy. I wished I could keep myself firm in that spiritual state. But it proved too difficult. I came back to the ordinary and mundane. From that golden state, to climb back to the sublime again, appeared to me almost impossible. And I grieved for the fall."

"This was the time when I was warned by my inner voice loud and clear: 'Such a sublime state cannot be attained at will. When it comes, it comes in a flash like a shower from the heavens, and it disappears in the same manner, never to appear again.' I came to realise that the precious feeling of godliness appears only through constancy. Keeping close to the company of the good, thinking good, serving good, feeling good and seeing good can be a safe way for regaining the Lost Kingdom."

"See that there is so much good all about that bad feels pale before its effulgence. Criticise yourself, not others; blame yourself, not others; punish yourself, not others; hate yourself, not others; love and love alone is for others, and not for yourself."

"There cannot be so much darkness as can blot out the brilliance of good. Never take the fog as the end of a journey. Strive on, ply further, push on and on. The land beyond the fog will appear, and you will realise the truth that all is temporary, and only God is eternal. Love is eternal. Even Death is temporary. Life is eternal. Life never dies."

II

There are many who seek two things in all postulates: definition, and proof. Postulates stand by themselves as evident. There are many things which call for no proof, no definition. Love is its own proof, and baffles definition. So is God. God is indefinable because of His being above language. So is love. To feel is love; to realise is God. Circumstantial evidence alone points out that a heart is in love. Similarly, circumstantial evidence alone points out that behind the laws of nature, and the functions of life, there is a super-mind, a super-power which is beyond the grasp of logic. It is this incomprehensible power beyond the reaches of mathematics and reasonings which promotes, guides, contains and regulates the eternally active cosmic phenomenon of which the human presence is just an infinitesimal insignificant phenomenon. Indeed it is less than a mere minnow to a whale, a grain of sand to the mighty Himalayas, a dew drop to the rush of the Niagara. The seemingly insignificant stands as a witness for the sublime significant.

That immense from which all fractional forms emanate is the power divine which an individual can comprehend as God, but he cannot do any more. Man is limited, and his power is limited. The powers of the cosmic Brahman are unlimited. Consider a spoonful of water. It is really nothing but a part of the ocean. And the ocean is nothing but a formation of two gases: hydrogen and oxygen. The gases are nothing but the residual effect of the crushing (as if in a cosmic mortar) of trillions of cosmic nebulae surrounding the multitudinous galaxies. The surest way of getting rid of this personal vanity or personal sorrow is to comprehend the entire process of this subjective 'churning of the ocean,' this cosmic phenomenon, this '*mahadbhutam ascharyam*.' Gita speaks of this:

> '*Ascharyam*' (wondrous phenomenon). Some look at it as a wonder (*ascharyam*); some speak of it as '*ascharyam*,' a wonder; those who hear, they too listen, and get bemused; yet, none ever tries to understand this entirely.
>
> Gita:II:29

In the same Gita, at chapter XI, we find a trembling Arjuna faced with the great Truth regarding the transitoriness of life reflected against the immutability of the *dharma*, i.e., the principles that cause the life drama. The Truth unnerved him. Understandably so. It is not easy to absorb the great Truth. Only the great can absorb the fall of the Ganges on his head. A straw in the rush of the Niagra can hardly absorb the momentum of the torrential descension. Arjuna stood perplexed. It is not easy for even the hard-trained to face and absorb a cosmic Truth revealing a cosmic Principle. Man's comprehensive faculties can absorb only that much, and no more (cf. Narada Bhakti Sutra: NBS 1).

Yet it is not beyond the efforts of man to comprehend this. Indeed it is very much possible only when a man fully understands and absorbs the impact and purport of *bhakti parama prema-roopaa*, or Love that sweeps over all other considerations (NBS:2).

In order to comprehend this form of *bhakti*, the active human mind acts, or attempts to act, in two different ways. The first one refers to a fundamental characteristic of Indian system of mentally perceived analysis, which divides all comprehensions into three distinct categories.

The first one of these three relates to the pure ideal incorruptive essence and motivation of each action, thought or even an object. It is the ideal state of an object, even of any thought or urge. The last one must therefore be its opposite, which covers up the real with the confusion of the unreal, of light by darkness. The ennobling essence is *sattva*, and the opaque confusing muck is *tamas*. These are the two extreme polar categories of any object or idea.

Besides these two, there is a third category. This state of comprehension is always afflicted by a drive. In fact, it has neither the clarity and steadiness of the first pure state of comprehension nor the total sloth and depression of the last one.

In this class of comprehension, the mind's desire is to attain purity on the one hand, but on the other hand, the energy that is supposed to impel, propel, inspire or assist that drive to attain the spiritual state of complete purity gets slumped and bogged. As a result, the mind becomes overwhelmed by negative drives which counteract right comprehension.

These categorical tendencies, absolute, irresistible, and inherent, are known as *gunas*: fundamental properties of growth and prosperity inherent in all ideas and forms.

And the *gunas*, as explained before, are three: spiritual, worldly and anti-worldly, or hellish. The first is known as *sattva; 'sat'* meaning the real, unalterable property inherent in any object, action or idea. *Sattva* is self-contained and steady.

The second category is known as *raja*. *Raja* is always active, agitative, restless.

The last one is *tamas* which implies total dullness, lethargy, sloth—the very antithesis of progress of any kind.

Raja is activity in hot heat; and is pictured as Red. Both *Sattva* and *Tamas* are inactive; both are apparently inactive, but with a big and fundamental difference.

Sattva radiates a calm, steady, collected and filled inner power. Agitation is not known by *Sattva*. It is contained, comprehensive and composed. It is power without agitation; the power of the inner soul that radiates all thinking, all joy, all fulfilment.

Tamas contains the quiet of the dead. It is a lump of inertia; a heap sloth, bidding time in its own ignorance and inactivity. It looks outwardly as still as *Sattva*. But whereas the quietness of *Sattva* is charged with a dynamic progressive will force, the inertness of *Tamas* bogs all will and prospect down in a hell of total darkness and lack of will.

The stillness of *Sattva* is a stillness of the snow-laden Mount Everest, which standing still commands the entire life of the Indian valleys and panorama. It is activity in stillness.

The stillness of *Tamas*, in contrast, is a future-less, effortless, blind existence-in-itself without wish, will, drive, hope, or effort. It is the stillness of the dead of hope; dead of future; dead of motion.

The *sattva* person is inspired with progress, elevation, sagacity, selflessness, peacefulness, and above all, contentment without any discriminating consideration between profit, loss, success, failure, life, death, etc. No change disturbs him. Tranquillity is the supreme characteristic of the person gifted with the spirit of *sattva*. Such a man is called a sage, a god-man, a saint, a *sthita-dhih*, a *muni*. It is the one to whom the harassed of the earth, the discarded, the damned, the disowned, the aggrieved go for solace and peace.

The *rajas* man is filled with worldly emotions such as vanity, pride, envy, ambition, hate, even intriguing schemes and sentiments. He is filled with emotion and energy, and is enriched by a natural inner drive to achieve what he wants in the material perimeter. He is a man of action but his action aims at his personal benefit.

But the *tamas* man is free from such ideas, inspirations and efforts. He is sluggish and a misanthrope. He is completely effortless, completely negative. He makes no move for progress, and he is not disturbed by any sense of loss, or any motive for gain. He is the sloth, the sluggish personified.

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Once we try to bear these categorizations in mind, it is not hard to realize that these categorizations inevitably influence *bhakti*, or devotional love.

What do we seek in *bhakti*? Is it self-satisfaction alone? Only consummation? Only a mundane sense of fulfilment of the passion of possession?

Or, do we seek love alone, without sparing any efforts in order to achieve the tender spiritual joy inherent in *bhakti*? Do we seek, without matching our wishes with the required earnestness of will or effort?

Or, in love, we just indulge in hanging and swinging as a pendulum. "He loves me, He loves me not!"

We recognise *bhakti* by feeling it fervently, devotedly and constantly, lavishing our mind with some imagined sense of consummation.

In this way, when *bhakti* becomes affected by *gunas*, when urgency of achieving the goal gets conditioned by mental circumstances, we call it *gauni bhakti*, i.e., *bhakti* affected and conditioned by the *gunas*.

But love, when it has achieved its goal, has transcended all objective limitations. When love is complete in the rapturous ravishment of its pulp and essence, when there is nothing more to seek or gain, when the apex is achieved, the union has been locked in a spiritual embrace, and the mind is steady like the pure white flame of a lamp in a windless night, the feeling of ravishment becomes paramount. This state is known as the *para* state of Love.

In this *gunamaya* or *gauni* state, efforts to reach spiritual sublimation express progress through some kind of adherence, attachment. The *gauni* lover is bound to get attached to some tangible object—a person, a symbol, an idol, an ideal as most satisfying, and devotes all attention to that object of adoption. This is why and how acceptance of idol-worship gets hold of even some of the wisest persons. I can name in this context the dour Vendantist Madhusudana Saraswati whom we have quoted at the beginning of this book.

But in no case is this permanent. This is only a stage in the progress to the sublime. Sure enough, in the progress of this indulgence, a stage comes when the devoted person visualizes the spirit of the object of his love in all objects, all forms, all lives, all expressions. He reaches the sublime stage of a Prahlada, a Dhruva, a St. Aquinas, a St. Meera, a St. Teresa, or a St. Francis of Assisi. Such are the real Brahma-Seers.

All is Brahman to such a lover. He is *Sat* because he has realised *Sat*. He is the man of God.

He has tasted the grace of Para-Bhakti. Outside of this category of Bhakti, all is Apara Bhakti, consequential Bhakti, Bhakti attached to hopes, motives, prayers. The man blessed with Para-Bhakti has the courage to say, "I am ignorant of 'mine' and 'yours', ought and nought, profit and loss. My only prayer is that you accept me as your own, and do with me as it pleases you to do. You are my first and last resort."

In all parts of the world, in all forms of divine prayers, this has been considered as the *sumum bonum* of spiritual craving: dedication leading to prostration, and then to total identification. The Islamic sage calls it annihilation, or *phanaa*. He puts out the humble lamp to be one with the Light Eternal that burns within the heart of every dedicated soul. Sree Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, a great exponent of Bhakti as the only means of total salvation, is reputed to have prayed: "Oh my Beloved, let me only love you, and then dedicate myself so completely that you do with me as might please you." As long as the sense of 'I and you' dominates a union, the union, spiritually, is not complete. In a state of completely abandoned cosmic union, I and you shed their individual identity, and merge into a sense of ethereal ecstasy, *anandam*. Browning had loudly protested this feeling when he said, "As long as I am I, and You are You!"

Thus, Narada insists that the mere fact of realisation of God does not produce that intense satisfaction which is produced by complete dedication to the object of devotion. Bhakti seeks total identity. So long as there is a first person 'I', and a second person 'you', complete identification remains unaccomplished. In the Religion of love and Bhakti, there is—though for a little while—room for a feeling of duality.

How could Love function without a correspondent? Love is a process of progress from Relative to Absolute.

But this duality, however temporary it might be, is completely obliterated in the course of Love's progress. This is a duality which only makes room for perfect identity. The feeling of this oneness gradually envelopes all objects that can be perceived and conceived. The Love that does not overwhelm is no love. There is only One. The drop of water falls into the ocean, and becomes ocean.

Where there is 'I'-ness, there is no Para-Bhakti, which is known as *samadhi*: that is, a spiritual state of total identity, gradually emanating and saturating into all the other objects and forms of life. What sages refer to as 'immaculate conception' is a kind of God-sense in all lives and forms around.

In all religious forms of intense prayer this state of mind has been attained, as Radha is reputed to have achieved. But Radha was not alone. Such beatification had been attained by Meera of Rajasthan, St. Aquinas and St. Augustine, St. Cecil of Egypt, St. Noor Rishi and Habba Khatun of Kashmir, Al-Hajaj of Mesopotamia, St. Ishia, St. Bernadette of Lourde, Dhruva, Prahlaad, Ramakrishna and Tailanga.

Such instances of Divine Love are spread throughout history irrespective of time and place. The call of the individual soul for a union with the universal Soul has been fairly universally noticed. This nullifies the cynical assumption that a state of 'total begone-ness' in extreme instances of Bhakti, or dedicated prostration to the only object of love, is symptomatic of a kind of lunatic loss of mental balance.

Let me quote Eckhart, the German spiritualist: "As the Sun at dawn absorbs the surrounding darkness, so does the Soul absorb God until the Soul gets absorbed by God, leaving no trace of individuality. Some people believe in placing God 'there,' or 'yonder,' and placing 'I' here and away from

Him. This is neither correct nor proper. God and I are without any distinction. Only a person who is 'God-filled', i.e., who is filled with Love for God, could say so."

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Eckhart is a mystic, an idealist. His realization must be of a different texture which is beyond the simple comprehension of the common man. Yet the basic truth revealed by him holds an immortal experience which attempts to say that a taste of spiritual love is nearest to a taste of immortality. A sense of true love makes a person realize a state of undying joy. Love is deathless (NBS:3). "God is an ocean of immmortal joy," says sage Ramakrishna of Dakshineswara. "Enter into the ecstasy of the Lord," says Isaiah (51:11).

Once the Soul takes a full drink of this ecstasy it gains joy eternal (*anandam*) leading to a state of tranquil contentment (NBS:4).

A state of such tranquillity and contentment leads to a state of *moksha*: total release from all pulls and entanglements which keep life harnessed and fettered.

Having achieved this kind of total release, the mind is freed from all desire and ambition. It gets rid of the mind pulls. It stands far away from all the temptations and attachments that the mind creates, and pushes itself to a darker and darker abyss.

The Soul can now pride itself by saying, "I have achieved all that was worth achieving. Having achieved this, I have nothing else to achieve. No more desire; no more ambition; no more envy; no more tempting pleasure of the sense; and no more torture from any unquenchable flame of desire and more desire. My love has absolved me of all further kinds of desire. I am filled with a kind of joy which has no excitement, a kind of energy which has no heat. Oh celestial tranquillity! I feel filled with the ambrosia of immortal love, so filled do I feel that I have no room to receive even one more drop (NBS:5).

Narada does not stop here. He insists that the Soul revels in the ecstatic sphere of joy which the union with the divine grace alone can confer. It actually makes the Soul mad with joy. The impact of this tremendous force of joy stuns and bemuses any form of human expression. The tongue fails to describe this joy. Language falters by watching its own incapacity and expressions of all kinds die out. What remains is only a feeling consummated by the inner sense which thrills at the realization (NBS:6). Cf. Upanishad:

(1) *Yato vaachaa invartante apraapya manasaa saha.*

Language stops still; and the mind continues longing.

(2) *Bhidyate hridaya-granthih*
chhindante sarva samsayaah
Ksheeante sarva karmaani
Tasmin driste paraavare.

Once Realized, the Supreme experience pierces through all emotions, cuts through all doubts, and puts the Soul out of the cycle of actions and reactions.

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Sacrifice and Submission

Modern man, held under the grip of ideas of freedom and democracy, rebels against the concept of submission. The very word submission denotes to him a complete denial of freedom.

This type of resentment against the contributing factors of submission is not at all conducive to a state of inner peace. A peace loving man is also a peace giving man. A man of peace radiates peace all around. Such a man has gained this valuable status through cultivating the divine quality of submission. To be able to submit to a higher spirit, to a nobler idea or concept, to be able to kneel and seek spiritual contentment, is in itself an ennobling quality. No mother could rear a child without accommodating the noble spirit of submission. Every skilful angler knows how, in landing a big catch at the other end of the line, submitting at times to the whims of the game is necessary.

Submission is the noble quality of the strong. The strong feels his strength much more by understanding, appreciating, accommodating and fully sharing. The only way to increase the degree and impact of any pleasure is by sharing, distributing and assuming a mental posture of submitting. A spirit of submission acts, truly speaking, as a true guide to deeper knowledge.

The Gita says, "By submitting, by prostrating, by asking for more knowledge, by serving with humility, alone does one learn the core of all true knowledge: *Tad viddhi pranipaatena pariprashnena sevayaa.*"

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So Narada believes that all desires, except the intense desire for learning the ultimate Truth, must be brought to books, and concentrated into one single desire of knowing the true nature of God. Intense love, this knowledge does not leave any room for any other kind of love. Thus the seeker attaches no value to earthly possessions or sensuous pleasures.

Paramahansadeva had sent his beloved disciple Swami Vivekananda to the Mother's temple, and assured him that he would get anything he desired just by asking the Mother to give it to him. He was passing a worried time in those days thinking of the abject poverty of his widowed mother, brothers and sisters at home. But when he returned from the privacy of the sanctuary, Sri Ramakrishna found that, instead of asking for material means to remove the poverty of his family, he had only asked for the spiritual boon of inner light and God-consciousness. A man inspired with intense devotional love has nothing to seek except love for the divine. Divine love is the essence of life, and saturates living with eternity of joy (NBS:7).

Thus, for the man transfixed and saturated in divine love, the question of consummating the ecstasy is so overwhelming that any suggestion of abnegation and asceticism falls flat before him. Love is so positive a spirit, it admits of no negative renouncement. Love and renouncement are distant antipodes.

In love, renunciation means to merge all other desires, greed, longings, ties into the ocean of the single desire of oneness with God. For achieving that end, one need not adopt austerity or abandon life's gifts. Instead, one is supposed to cast every other desire into the supreme desire of love. Restraint or renunciation in love means converging all petty desires into the sublime acquisition of divine love.

The question of this singleness of attention and care devoted to the object of love really has little to do with renunciation. The soul in love, in fact and spirit, renounces nothing. As the old skin falls off a snake, old covers fall off the horns of reindeers or mooses, old leaves come off a forest, so in fact the obvious pictures of renunciation actually enhance the real progress of life. This is no abandonment or renunciation. This projects no negativity. It is like my lady discarding the container after she has retrieved her diamond pendant, and hung it near her heart. The real is adored; the dross falls off in the nature of things. Renouncement as a process has not been accepted by Mother Nature. It is anti-life, anti-purpose of life.

In the Living Process even Death is Life; even renouncement is building New Life, New Hope. There is never a total goodbye.

In the same manner, the soul merged in divine love is so filled by it that all clinging, hugging, weighty dross-relationships fall off on either side of the path of progress. That is no renouncing. That is a chapter in the scheme of cosmic progress. Who could ever drop the final curtain?

This suffers no negative effort of rejection or abandonment, or renouncement. The apparent negating attitude of the soul in love reflects indeed the rejuvenating new birth of an awakened soul filled with and drunk with the love of God. Watch the plucked (dead ?) barley sprout into a new life. Love is never dead.

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When an inspired lover of God renounces all other social, physical or material bonds, that renouncement, instead of forgetting or abandoning responsibilities, helps him to merge every other consideration into the single consideration of Love for God.

All that he had, or could have, all his relations and responsibilities, ambitions and the remotest desires get charged by this single intense love for God. He feels free of all other objects of desire except the great desire for God.

God-Love is all-absorbing. This love admits of no second, admits of no abode other than the abode of peaceful love, i.e., Love for God, for God is Love. True renunciation means renouncing all, except love for God. The lover of God renounces all things which might resent this kind of divine love (NBS 8-11). The Gita says, "To renounce is to suffer, unless the renouncement is not made in favour of God."

Love fully emancipates. Love's shackles are the fastest, and entirely unbreakable. It influences the mind in all its three strata of mind: the conscious, the subconscious and the supraconscious. Even in dreams and deep sleep, the wings of love continue to fan the soul of the beloved as well as the lover. That love which fails to unite the object and subject of love into one is not Love.

In my childhood, my father used to make me recite a pretty and witty Sanskrit verse, which gives me much pleasure even now:

> *Shri Govinda padaambhoja madhuni phalamadbhutam*
> *Payino yan-na muhyanti muhyanti yad apaayinah*
>
> A drink of the Love for God has very contrary effects: those who drink of it do not lose their sense; which, however, is lost by those who abstain from partaking of it.

The way to secure this God-love is rather hazardous, and the pits along the way are many. The story of Radha trying to reach Krishna in his bower says how she had to negotiate so many pitfalls and hazardous obstructions.

Hence it is absolutely necessary to take guidance from the charts left by previous travellers along this journey, and then strictly follow the route-map and the injunctions left by them.

Guidance is required until the time that love becomes confirmed, and the union gets secured. Otherwise man could easily stumble and fall down to his ruins by deviating from the marked path. Pure love maintains peace and quiet, and suffers no exposure or exhibitionism. This makes the journey to love secluded and lonely. Hence a guide, hence the tradition of Gurus (NBS:12-13).

Know thy Love

Love is divine. Love that seeks gains, personal or material, is no love. Such love at best is an investment, a stake and gamble. At worst, it is a self-deluding ritual.

A soul in true love can be marked by several symptoms and symbols. Divine love, i.e., Bhakti, expresses itself through rituals and submission, sacrifices and humility.

Many mistake ritualistic forms as genuine steps to enlightenment. They also think that once the soul attains consummate realization—the Brahma-vision, the rites fall off as the sheath of old skin shed by a snake, or the annual autumnal leaves shaken off by a verdant woodland.

Great seers are known to have continued their rites even after they have attained the supreme emancipated state of consciousness. They think that steps in a palace frontage have to be maintained. Discipline has to be maintained throughout life, even rigorously, if required.

Besides the formal discipline (daily rites of prayers), the true *bhakta* who loves God likes to discuss God, listen to the praises of God, and attach himself to actions pleasant to God. He is, people think, a fool who breaks down the staircase because he has already climbed on the roof.

Discipline has to be maintained throughout life. Sage Garga insists on these steps for the continuous blissful experiences. He points out the values of listening to the tales of divinities and divine heroes. Hence the popularity of the readings of the Puranas and the Epics.

Individual adulation turns a common mortal to a divine hero, as has happened to so many heroes of so many nations.

Garga or Narada apart, and despite their emotional treatment, Shandilya follows his rigid logical treatment of the subject. He would rather psychoanalyse the interplay of emotional impacts which finally arouse Bhakti's feelings.

Our guide in this complex situation, viz. emotion versus reason in cultivating Bhakti, is Narada (NBS:17-18).

He symbolizes, boldly, love in general, and Bhakti in particular. One merged in Bhakti cultivates really one's love for the Divine. In such love, one thinks of the Beloved, acts for the Beloved, and constantly keeps engaged to the Beloved. Any suggestion, even if it seemingly sounds a healthy one, of cutting off this constancy, is gall to him.

To love, to think of love, to act for love, to listen to the beloved's praises, to sit close to love, to become indispensable to the beloved appear, even as penances, divinely satisfying.

Gita notes (V:17-19) the same sentiments, and suggests the same instructions. According to the progress of this constancy, the devotion that flourishes leads the devotee to complete liberation. Love is not love if it does not liberate. The sense of love that binds, embarrasses, suffocates and forces mind to seek shelter under cryptic cover and camouflage is more a snare than a liberation. Such love does not have to turn back. It progresses until the final abode of guaranteed peace is achieved (NBS:19).

Of course this is no theory. This can be observed by a keen and sensitive mind. The intense relationship which a serious mind establishes finally becomes evident to all observers.

The fact is that a mind exposed too much to romances of visual gadgets, to proximity of indeterminate crowds, obviously generates unwelcome and unwholesome excitement which finally overwhelms all good sense. The tenderness of delicate sentiments is turned into opaque insensitive moles. As a result, in spite of all our attempts and efforts, we feel baffled, defeated, dead. This is the darkness of *tamas* which overwhelms our mental horizon, and we feel lost.

The great Vaishnava Master-figure Bhagavan Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu clearly said that "God's Love is effective only for those who serve the poorest, the meanest, the deprived and the decried of the earth."

Trinadapi sernscchena taroriva sahishnuna
Amaniaa manadena kirtaniyah sada Hari

Bhakti is relevant to the deprived mass. *Jnana*, or *Samkhya-yoga*, is reserved for the Brahmanical upper classes, who indeed are found to be the cause of such deprivations. Love does not make distinctions. In Bhakti, all lives are equal.

Gita speaks with a finality which sounds prophetic and oracular against the above analysis:

Rishibhi-r-vahudha geatam chhandobhi-r-vividaih prithak
Brahmasootra pada-shaiva hetumad-bhi-r-vinishchitaih

This mystery has been discussed in various ways by the sages and scholars.

In such a situation, love provides the light. Love redeems, and love rehabilitates.

Examples may be cited from the Epics and Puranas like Dhruva, Prahlada, Draupadi, particularly the Gopis of Brindavana.

> "Ma, here I offer to Thee my sins, my virtues; give me devotion alone, Ma, and Love. I offer you my knowledge, my ignorance; give me devotion and love. I offer you the sacred and the profane; give me devotion and love."

The above was the crying prayer of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, exactly in line with the prayers of the cowherd girls of Brindavan. Swami Vivekananda viewed the all sacrificing total submission, prostration, assimilating union of the girls of Brindavan as the '*sumum bonum* of the religion of love, whereby the ego-self has been melted away in the impersonal ocean of joy and peace.'

It is true that the Gopis treated Him as a dear object of Love. Yet they never forgot His divine impact and supreme presence. In true love, the senses cease to react; only the supersense absorbs the thrill. The sensuous becomes charged with the sublime, the erotic with peaceful beauty and sweetness. Such an inspired person turns into an 'unperson,' and the material world outside appears to him as purely subjective. This is the way of love which bursts through the walls of sensuous limitations, and reaches the open space of Cosmic Delight—*Brahma samvit*.

It tears apart all doubts and calculating hesitations; and by finally overcoming the waves of actions and reactions, reaches the quiet expanse of the outer ocean. (*Bhidyate hridaya granthih chhindante sarva samshayaah ksheeanate sarva karmaani tasmin driste paraavare*—Upanishad.)

The Gopis dared and loved. So great and overwhelming was this love that it overflowed all kinds of bars and restrictions, personal and social. The intensity and constancy of that love burst through threats of ignominy and scandal. This tremendous solidarity of heart could be achieved only by realizing that to love is to reach emancipation. Not for a moment did they forget that to love intensely is to feel intensely the presence of God. If that were not so, the love of the Gopis would have to be reduced to cheap promiscuous indulgence of fallen women of the streets. Divine love is distinguished from other kinds of mundane love by a total lack of self-aggrandisement and self-consciousness (NBS: 20-24).

What Man Seeks Ultimately

Peace of mind. A sweet sense of fulfilment free from all desires. Freedom from ego, leading to beatitude, inner vision, peace, tranquility, freedom from all frictional concepts, and the final grasp of the theme of totality, i.e., Brahman.

That is what man seeks ultimately.

Loving God, dedication of the soul, the conscious self's motivations for continuance of this mortal existence, appears obviously to most of us as the only way to secure mental peace. So strongly is the pull of material motivation that its spiritual aspect pales into insignificance.

But all sages, even worldly people, roaming confused in a world filled with objects, often miss the subject, unaware of the divine escape and that this ultimate knowledge is attainable. Whether we succeed in attaining it is a different matter.

Sages have shown us many ways of attaining Self-awareness and as a corollary, peace of mind also. They have found out different ways for securing this peace, this ultimate and total peace. There are four ways in all: Self-realization is attainable through (a) meditation; (b) analytical dissection as propounded in Samkhya, also known as yoga; (c) selfless activities in life, or karma yoga; and (d) the way of Bhakti or devotion to the love for God. Gita says:

Dhyaanenaatmani pashyanti, kechidaatmanam-aatmanaa
Anye Saamkyena yogena karma-yogena-chaapare.

The nature of Self is visualized by different methods. Some adopt meditation. Some adopt the methods as propounded by Samkhya and Patanjali (i.e. by an analytical dissection into the world of objective reality). But these are not all. There are still other ways. The divine grace is attainable through dedicating lives to social work, through making life useful to others living and suffering world around.

"But of these," says the Gita, "the man of vision and self-knowledge is held as a very special one, since he is constantly dedicated and filled with divine love."

"The Man of Self-knowledge loves Me; and I reciprocate, and love him."

Teshaam jnaani nitya-yuktah eka-Bhaktih-r-vishishyate.

But the four ways are not closed like airtight compartments. Any one of the four can act as a complementary of the other three. Extreme and total dedication in love, a total identification of the self and the object of life is called *Eka-Bhaktih* (singleness of loving attachments). Such a person is termed by the Gita as distinguished, or unique.

The Brahman is attainable through super-Bhakti, para-Bhakti, or Love sublime. This love is both the way and means, as well as the very object of love. Love seeks no person or object, but the love in the person or the object. To such an intense lover, a cross or a meteoric stone, a drop of water from a special river or pond like the Ganges or the Jam-Jam, or even a lighted candle on a church altar, or a lamp-boat floated along a river, attains great significance. The outwardly small or common attains importance spiritually. By counting the beads and chanting the name of the Loved One, the devotee seeks to feel the closeness of the subject of love and adoration. That adoration and the subject of adoration become identical to the devotee's perception and feeling (NBS: 25).

This brings us to a very sensitive area of choosing one definite way: to meditate and find, or to love and get absorbed? In other words, which path to choose? The stern hard way of Samkhya and Yoga? Or the tender constancy of deep love and adoration?

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In this connection, we are reminded of a very restrictive lesson left by the apocryphal record of how Ramakrishna loves. There is a common saying amongst the humble seekers of Bengal who express their queries, as well as findings, in bits of sweet songs. One of these songs has a line: "I do not desire to become a lollipop; I would rather taste it." And the Sage of Dakshineswar was asked what he thought about the line. The simple Sage replied, "For those who are strange to sugar or lollipop, getting the lump of sugar will certainly be a greater attraction; but those who have already tasted the thing would rather continue with the taste, and would not care to 'become' a lollipop."

Thus he said that the experience and consummation is THE thing, and not the object that helps give the experience. He who is engaged with the object gets tied up with the limits of the object, but those who have experienced the spiritual abstraction of subjectivity do not care for the shape, size, colour or form of the object which he adores and seeks. Filled within by the aura, who cares for the objects without?

Herein lies a great solution of the dialectical controversy of *Dvaita* (dualism in worship) and *Advaita* (rigid monism). As long as the taste of the abstract has not been attained, as long as experience has not inspired and enthused the urge of seeking more and even more, the form, the shape, the solid factual objectivity of a form has a very high value, like a pair of glasses to a myopic or a stick to a lame man. But once the sight is cleared, the handicap is removed, who cares for the glasses or the stick, even if they are framed in gold or diamond?

Thus the meditator meditates on the abstract Holy Ghost, Atman, Brahman, Allah or Jehovah. That meditation being Subjectively Realised, a devotional bond is established. The meditative intellection gives way to emotional attachment. Knowledge leads to love, and the two get wrapped up in a singleness in an emotional bondage like Meera and Tulsi, Teresa and Jesus.

As long as duality holds the door ajar, the closed secluded joy of Oneness is never experienced. All actions stop at realisation, and realization's resultant effect is the graced award of Love. We love what we realize, and we realize what we strive for: we strive for Self-experience.

Once we love, we have no care of methods, or steps to that knowledge. The end of all knowledge lies mute and still in love. In love, the two-ness or duality becomes One. In this Supreme Union, all doubts, hesitations, and controversies stand still and dumb; where experimentations fly past the gossamers of last season's autumn; where altar candles stand mute and reposed before the glow of the inner light; where darkness makes way for revelation and light; where the theorectical gets merged and lost in an abandonment of experience, consummation and *bodhi*.

No lover cares for Advaita. Love seeks Dvaita. Hence all these forms, statues, altars, special days, special litanies, appear as mere jars into which the final panacea for all ills of dissatisfaction is kept stored. Through the joy of reaching the finality of all chasing, love has attained to the great heights where language is still, and expressions stay useless.

I recall here Emmanuel Kant. He, like Vyasa and Shankara, and the great Acharya Abhinavagupta, had proclaimed that the essence of an idea remains beyond the scope of a person as long as he maintains, or is jeopardized by the difference between the knower and the object of knowledge. The great mystic Eckhart insisted that in realization, the Realised takes a back seat. St. John on the cross sought Union, and valued Union much more than knowledge of love.

In this connection, I cannot but recall the sublime confessions left by the great Nun of Avila about her communion with her Lord, and about her final consummation of that Love. The reading of that passage in her "Confessions" more than clears up the joyous outbursts of a female lover in embracing her Beloved in a deep and fully satisfying personal embrace. [The author corroborates the feeling from personal experience.]

The Hindu speaks of *samadhi* in this sense; the Sufi refers to his *fanaa* in this sense.

The world panorama is filled with the flitting sense of duality, but once this duality merges into a sublime Union, then the Soul cries: *Bhidyate hridaya granthih* (Oh my heart, my heart, it bursts in its seams). It says, '*Yato vaachaa nivartante*.' Words are mute for the mind cannot express and define the ecstasy as *a-baang-manasa-gochara* (beyond the grasp of mind or words). Knowledge: viz., the knower, the method of knowledge, and the required actions suggested by the methods (*karta, karana, and karma*).

The pure *Bhakta* (Lover), the divinely devoted one, is saturated in the drink of the ambrosial experience alone, in the *rasa* that is. He is free from all other considerations. No more techniques, grammar, reservations and nerve-breakers. In the elysium of Finality, there is only *rasa*, and thrill (*spanda*), only cessation of all movements. That perfect Stillness, that *bodhi*, that *samvit* attained, life's further functions get entirely exhumed. The pure lover, the divinely devoted one, is saturated in the experience alone, in the *rasa*, and is free from all other considerations, methods or techniques. No more grammar for him, only the joy of *rasa*. Brahman or Self-knowledge is attained in a state of *samadhi* alone, where experience alone throbs. All else gets absorbed into a genital and apex feeling.

Na veda-yajnaa-dhyanai-r-na daahaih
Na cha kriyaabhi-r-na tapobhi-r-ugraih...

The eleventh chapter of the Gita asserts at a climax that the effulgence of Truth's revelation cannot be attained through just reciting the Vedas, performing rites as enjoined by scriptures or by mere acts of charities, neither by enacting penances: "I am attainable to full vision and concept only through complete dedication in perfect and total Love."

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This takes us to a very controversial area, Tantra and its practices. To the novice and the charlatan, Tantra appears from outside to be a pocket of aberrations and perversions. (Sometimes it is so when misused by the misleading.) It appears to be definitely unsocial, fierce and bathed in high superstition, mysticism and necromancy.

The fact is Tantra is an entirely simple rustic proletariat way for unsophisticated folks to cultivate the celebrated way of love. It has been practised ever since man needed to pray. Love in Tantra is divine and spiritual, particularly based on filial love. Of all forms of love, since filial love between a mother and her child is regarded both indispensable and spontaneous, it is also regarded to be the most pure and natural expression of love.

Man, in adoring love, imaged the Mother as the source and end of the way of love in attaining sublimation. The Mother alone, through her blessings, leads an erring child away from life's pitfalls. Life is always under a threat from whiffs and passions of emotions such as uncontrolled material and carnal desires which generate envy, greed, even unbridled sexual fascinations. This threat to a peaceful existence demands thorough investigation, analysis and correction through discipline.

Tantra rigidly enforces this discipline, not through a method of negation and rejection, but by a method of practically facing realities eye to eye. It is like facing a tiger eye to eye in order to tame the ferocious.

Thus the Tantric programme leads through the bizarre way of bloodshed, fear, drinks and drugs. Even sex, if there be a propensity for it, is not a motivated countermand. The novices in this line are fully trained through objects of practical indulgences under the all pervading umbrella of the great Mother's love. In course of time, this love becomes so real, living and sensitive that they see this love everywhere, and everything appears to them as a projection of the Mother. This in short is the core of Tantric persuations. Spiritually, love alone forms the basis of this Tantric phenomenon.

And when all appears to be evolved out of the Mother's Grace, then this love becomes real as well as perennial. Then all appear to be children of the Mother. Even sex-urge and sex-fulfillment appear to be direct gifts from the grace of the Mother. The entire creation looks as if a projection of the motherly grace. This view stands quite contrary to the old Christian concepts regarding the origin of life, and the wondrous perpetual drama of proliferation and propagation of life. That there has to be an urge and drive at the back of every passing moment of the creative phenomenon, finds full recognition and acceptance in this seemingly weird Tantric way of the quest.

The phenomenon is cosmic, and irresistible. The Tantra way is not just another way of carnal indulgence. Not at all. Instead, the way of Tantra, and the position of love/Bhakti in the Tantra syndrome, reflect the cosmic truth that life's aroma and beauty is a concomitant gift from the mother, as the free flow of her milk from her breast is.

The image of this milk giving mother impressed the ancient man so much that they raised temples in her name, and worshipped her from Palestine to Sicily and Egypt in many names from Isis, Artemis, Hathore, Aphrodite and Diana. Figures with her breasts, and genitals open for signifying fertility, and embellished with many breasts, are found in the famous shrine at Pasha in Palistine.

But the ancient Biblical view in this regard gets blurred in the legend of banishment from heaven due to a 'sin'. Is a baby the product of a sin committed? How silly and hyprocritical? How unnatural and prudish?

The concept of sins and hell and limbo are taken into the Bible from the mystery cults of Astarte and Hathore, and this grew because of a total misunderstanding of this mystery or Tantra-cult, as well as a total rejection of the ideation of a Mother, a Madonna. Tantra consistently adores the Mother.

Through this alien concept of sin, later Biblical chronicles suffered from immanageable contradictions, and fundamental aberrations through which the entire Christian view of life and the Christian society in general has been forced to fight a losing battle against the sex syndrome, sex utility, sex drama, appeal and draw of the elevated poetry and arts, music and dance. Sublimity of Eros spread all along the crowded theater of sex.

We too have been affected by that anti-Nature (*Prakriti*) parable of the Garden of Eden, the discomfiture and distress of the pain of the Eternal Lovers, the Serpent and its Majesty and the supposed tragedy that follows.

The tragedy nowhere sounds justified or deserving. Instead, it projects in our imagination the cruel deprivation inflicted on a pair of lovers by the tyranny of a perverted mind bent upon interfering with a very natural process.

This nature is projected as 'Ma' in Tantra. This nature has been called *prakriti* in Samkhya. This nautre or *prakriti* has been viewed as the *Shakti* (the urge of libido) in Tantra. By bowing down to the forces as revealed in Tantra, we bow down to the powers of a cosmic event which sustains life, projects the life drama, and upholds the principle of continuity.

Whereas the Biblical view ends up in a blind-lane, unsupportable and illogical, the basic view of Tantra accepts, analyses, and worships this very real, natural, and cosmic force. This is the Mother power; and Tantra cultivates and worships it.

In doing so, the Tantra-Saadhanaa or the Tantra view of life comes close to the Vedic-Saadhanaa of Life Force as depicted in the famous verses (*sookta-s*) of the Vedas: Ratri-Sookta, Prthvi-Sookta, Pavamani Sookta, Purusha Sookta, along with Vaak-Sookta, etc., and the Purana recitations known as Devi Stuti and Narayani Stuti (A stuti is a prayer.).

What the vague and controversial Vedanta propounds as the Brahma-Sootra sustains an idealism—a Brahmanical idealism which goes much above the head of the common man. But what Tantra propounds appeals to the mind which knows and practises Love as Love has to be practised, but dedicates the entire Love-Sex, Sex-Love syndrome.

In this sense both the Brahmanical Vedanta and the proletariat Tantra propound, illustrate, and advocate the truth that One is All, and All is One. The same spirit illumines the soul of all living, as well as seemingly lifeless, things.

And, added to this, Tantra advocates the essence and urgency of Bhakti, love and devotion much more fervently than the love advocated by the Vedas, Vedantas, and Brahmasutras, which appeal to the special brains known as Brahmanical. Tantra addresses the proletariat man, and directly appeals to the emotional demands of the masses. Bhakti belongs to the second category.

The great Vaishnava Master-figure Bhagavan Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu clearly said that "God`s Love is effective only for those who serve the poorest, the meanest, the deprived and the decried of the earth"

Triaadapi suneechena taroriva sahishnunaa
Amaaniraa maanadena keertaniyah sadaa Hari

Bhakti is relevant to the deprived mass. *Jnana,* or *Samkhya-yoga,* is reserved for the Brahmanical upper classes, who indeed are found to be the cause of such deprivations. Love does not make distinction. In Bhakti, all lives are equal.

Gita speaks with a finality which sounds prophetic and oracular in consonance with the above analysis:

Rishibhi-r-vahudhaa geetam chandobhi-r-vividaih prithak
Brahmasootra pada-s-chaiva hetumad-bhi-r-vinishchitaih

This mystery has been discussed in various ways by sages and scholars of all times in the Vedas, in the Upnishads, and in the Six Systems of Indian metaphysics. But these offer no finality, because the subject and the field of knowledge are vast, wide and profound.

The lesson of love or Bhakti cuts through all these metaphysical overgrowth and undergrowth, and holds that the all-pervading Sun of Love in Bhakti shines over all, and pierces through all obstructions.

Regarding the soul which has attained the vision of Brahman, i.e. the truth that the All is saturated by the One, and the One is shining in all (although due to ignorance, it may not be revealed), Shankara makes a wonderful statement. He says, "Standing or resting, howsoever, the man of Realization keeps himself to himself; he is undoubtedly fully illumined in himself; and entirely enjoys himself to be so, for he is liberated and filled with ecstasy." This is how para-Bhakti or sublime love has been described.

Some are deluded to think that knowledge leads to Bhakti-love. Yet some others think that neither unrelated wild love nor the intellectual way through knowledge can be self-sufficient because each looks for some assistance from the other. But Narada himself asserts that love is its own reward, and depends on no erudition or self-formed love, which is sentimental, or, at best, emotional alone.

None can please a monarch by just looking at him, or get satisfied by just watching heaps of food. Such unrelated superfluous exercises do not carry either the favour of the person seen, or the food reviewed (NBS:28-32).

In order to know *the Lover* one must enter into the soul of the Beloved other by getting near him, and absorbing him fully. In order to gain the best benefit from the food, one must eat, digest and assimilate it. It is therefore absolutely important and unavoidable to get closest to the object of desire and love by a full knowledge of it both theoretically and practically. Love the one whom you know. Never jump to a conclusion. In Bhakti, the stake is your life here, as well as hereafter. Through Bhakti, one stakes one's entire enquiry, purpose, exercise and achievement (NBS: 33).

How to Love

Love that adores the spirit beyond the form is the love divine, i.e. Bhakti with an added element of submissive devotion in it. Devotion is not restricted to a 'superior' from an 'inferior.' In sublime Love, there is no distinction. All are equal; all relate to the One. Love alone removes all bars—social, material or intellectual.

But the question arises how to acquire this love with adoration and devotion, which is known as Bhakti, and on which Narada has left his aphoristic manual.

Great Souls who had had a deep taste of this kind of love have left records of their ecstatic state through great hymnals, songs and symbolical literature. Just listening to the poetic creations, and getting inspired by them, is not enough.

The experience of love leads to an experience of total and entire demolition of every single restriction which divides a man from a man. Complete liberation is the direct gift of total love.

If love is God, then God lives within every soul that loves. Coleridge's 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner' vividly describes how the load of the dead albatross (the sinful crime of cruelty to another life) fell down into the sea the moment the glow of love sparked into the soul of the sinner.

Sin does not have enough power to dominate love. 'A flame throws light about the darkness; only the darkness does not know it.' Such enlightening liberating love springs in souls hungering for the divine love. The intensity of that all-submitting craving alone lights the lamp within the dark chamber. Ramakrishna used to say, "The wind of Divine Grace is blowing all seasons non-stop; all you have to do is to set the sail on."

In order to deserve this degree of grace, the love for God too should be proportionally intense. All love for material possessiveness or social contact must be pushed back in order to let this flame of love burn without jumping shadows to scare a timid self-conscious mind. "My Love is so jealous and full that it does not suffer any duality. It is so overwhelming that after drawing within, it leaves no trace on the surface of the object completely swallowed and merged."

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"What is the divine duty, *dharma*? The answer to this question is to find complete identity between resolves and function, words and mind," said Swami Turiyananda of the Ramakrishna Order. Dharma is finding a peaceful way to carry out resolves to functional ends. This has to be done for social good, and personal satisfaction.

In the Gita (VIII:14), the Master says, "He who loves me, sings of me all the time with an undivided mind, finds it so easy to attain me, for he is the yogi dedicated to me without the least diversion."

This kind of firmness and constancy confirms the faith in dedication. The lover delights in singing of the beloved, as well as listening to His praises (NBS: 34-37).

This reminds me about the entirely stupid controversy, leading to millions of killings over the ages, over the debate of worshipping God in the abstract concept (immaculate conception) or in objects of stone, metal, wood or even in a painting. The debate is as stupid as to laugh at a congenital myopic for the use of a pair of glasses, or, at a lame person for using a pair of crutches, or, at a blind man to hold the lead of a dog, or a student when he consults a teacher, a map, or a written commentary. The importance to a navigator of a compass or of stellar bodies cannot be appreciated by land-hugging home-birds.

To name God in one language and deny other names of the same God in other languages is an example of sheer fanaticism and ignorance. The beloved envisaged in a form engages the attention of the devotee in personal intimacy. He experiences the highest and noblest thrill of joy in realising a close identity, which all forms of religion seeks as the ultimate. This is *samadhi*, described by metaphysicians as well as devotees most emphatically. Francisco Barnini's 17th century famed sculpture of St. Teresa in trance is an example. Hymnals, music, ecstatic expressions as found in living consummation of ecstasy in all other forms of art, irrespective of languages, irrespective of differences in time, history and geography, have made deaf appeals to the devotional millions.

The Vedas have their *saamas*; the Testaments have their psalms; the devouts in Islam have their Ghazals and Kawalies; the Buddhists have their pensive and deep-throated chants with cymbals. The many Quakers, Shakers, Granthis, Shaman reciters, together with the sculptors, the painters and the architects of all countries, have been laying their heartfelt positive emotions in terms of words, painting, music, sculpture, and every other form of art.

Even though some claim the positive subjectivity of the Divine as an abstract and all pervading spirit, architecture has progressed through the millennia in distinctly different moulds and forms. The forms differentiate a stupa from a shrine or a temple; a zigurrat from a pyramid or a mosque; a church, a synagogue from an Inca temple construction. Man-made outer differences makes no difference between a South American Inca, an African Zulu, or a Moorish or Egyptian God; between a Greek or a Roman God; between a Catholic and a Protestant God; between a Jew and an Islamic God; between a Vedic and a Puranic God.

The fact is that God is One and the Same, Universal and Perennial. Man has Him divided in pieces, and so fanatically insists 'his' interpretation to be the 'bull's-eye-correct.' In his fever of divine excitement, the fanatic has never hesitated to bring devastations to civilisation after civilisation in favour of his 'own' individual insistence of having 'his' mould of God as the finality of divine perception.

(History interprets that all of this saturnine sanguinary drama was nothing but a grand hoax cynically designed to gain from loot, plunder and immediate commercial benefits. If there were no Limasol, or Venice, there would be no Crusades; if there were no Baghdad, Gazni, Delhi, Kanauj or Vijaya Nagar, there would be no Panipat, or spread of Islam. All wars are exercises in greed and avarice.)

Love and devotion to God can never indulge in killings and bloodshed. Yet man-made religions, man-made gods have allowed rivers of blood to flow in their names and in the spirit of self-righteousness. War is a monument of self-deception, soul's trickery.

This kind of contradiction raises doubts about the fervour of the fanatic who is ready to kill to throw his own God-idea in the eyes of those who are accustomed to cherish the imaged God in another nature and shape. The God of the desert must reflect green and cool, with the crescent moon as the lady most coveted; the God of the Himalayan or Antarctic snows must prefer heat and devotionally approach fire and the sun as their object of worship. A Bedouin cannot conceive a Yang-si-Kiang or Indo-Gangetic valley devotional form, and accept the natural gifts of rivers as forms of divine grace. A Brahmin cannot finish his ablutions with rubbing sands for that purpose.

Geography is the mother of history, and greed and love of power is the mother of priestly and ritualistic religions. In the name of God, the institutionalized religions indulge in amassing power, wealth, lust and passion. The perpetrators of such heinous practices are generally fully aware of their grievous sins. They are aware of the crime of squeezing and depriving the masses of their material savings at the cost of poverty, hunger, even death of these people.

This is, to say the least, criminal. The beneficiaries of such a lop-sided social dispensation are a class known as priests, custodians of spiritual virtues, religion-brokers. The high profession of God-brokerage is criss-crossed with a thousand convictions. True God rest on true philosophy and sound spiritualism.

God, the Universal and One God, cannot be associated with tyrannies of distinction, discrimination, cruelties, avarice, lechery and ritualistic killings, and even murder.

No single religion can claim total acquittal from imaging its 'own' God. An individualized divinity's habits, preferences, abodes, musical tunes, dance diversions, food, followers, etc. make one God different from another. This invites blood-stained history, and the age-long serial of hate and sins against God.

Bhakti and love is almost instinctive. It is the nature of life to love and propagate joy. In doing so each individual, commune, people create their own God. And this is quite understandable. The harsh desert God cannot suit the God of the Alps; the Amazonian God cannot suit the God of the South Seas.

In spite of this rigmarole, all God-loving people know that God is One, although man has inevitably conceived Him in many shapes. All gods become One in love. Even all forms, images, rituals, and prayer forms stand justified to the man of God, to the devout, to the visionary, to the saint, to the yogi. Love suffers no discrimination.

The path that leads to such love has been chalked out by the devouts, the saints, the Darvishes, the Faquirs, the bodhisattvas, the Vaishnavas.

And once this is understood, the quest for the companionship and guidance of a saintly God-person makes such a union possible. The gift of a right Guru or Murshid is a direct gift from God. "The man Guru is just a conduit; what flows through it is water; the source of that water is the Divine Compassion, without which conduits run dry," says Ramakrishna.

As long as the mind is conscious of discrimination, love for God cannot be reached, for there is no distinction between love and what is loved. In love, Life becomes God, and God becomes Life. The source of all vibration is the great effulgence we accept as the only God.

Therefore, love God, love God. Reach for that love through the Guide who holds the key to His gates (NBS: 38-42).

Contact—Congregation—Mass Prayers

A crowd does not make a congregation. Friends chosen for similarity of tastes and quest, assembled for a spiritual purpose, form a congregation. Avoid the incompatibles, the discordants as much as possible. Keep attention studiously away from contraries. There is no good or bad. Our own mistaken choices are responsible for the sufferings we bear from associations. Gita warns (II:62-63): "Desires are evolutes of associated experiences of senses; and frustrated desires project high passions, and angers which bedevil the correct thinking process. Thoughts disturbed produce confusion. Man loses the teachings of memory, loses good sense, and having lost good sense, destruction is not far away."

The attraction from objects that excite the senses has been called *maya*, a condition of our relationship with the world around us, and in spite of being transitory, leads us to the confusing compulsions of forming temporary, unstable and unwholesome relationships which never last. This ephemeral, yet binding, attraction is very hard to shake off. There are legends in the Hindu Puranas to illustrate that even the highest of the God-head, a Vishnu or a Shiva, has made a fool of himself by falling into the trap of false attractions which *maya*'s magic forces on all minds, even the wisest. Illusory confusion bedevils the better senses of even the wisest.

Yet there is a way, a definite way of avoiding these alluring associations. And that way lies through keeping company of the noble souls, and serving them with all love and attention: love for the Self, and attention for the person chosen as a guide and friend.

So complete must be this friendship, love and service that there would remain no ounce of love to be spared to be spent on the personal self. Even love must be devoted totally for the beloved. Entire sacrifice of the self for the love of the beloved leaves no portion to be spared for selfishness. Own nothing, and fear nothing. Merge completely, and risk no separation. Shankaracharya argues this point in the following words: "That which is not the Atman is only an object." Any relationship with an object suffers from limitations. But the Atman is subjective, and a subject differs from an object as light does from darkness, and knowledge from ignorance. We, in common parlance, declare, 'I am not well,' or 'I am afraid to enter,' not ever enquiring about who is referred to as 'I.' Who is this 'I'? What is its height, weight, colour, form? Of course, the body or the form is not 'I.'

This 'I' is perceived by the pure of thought as referred to in the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are those who are pure of Heart, for they shall see God."

Bhakti has been termed by Swami Vivekananda as the higher science of love. Bhakti alone guides and controls the flippant passion of love's heat, and turns it into indefatigable energy that propels purpose. Bhakti would never cry, "Abnegate! Abnegate! Abandon all." Instead, this form of sanctified love would advocate 'Love, love and love more until the duality ceases; and one purpose, one existence, one experience covers up all.'

And when love dedicates in this way, it must be dedicated to those great and well tried souls who could sincerely and truthfully declare, "I have experienced the Supreme"; "I am Brahman"; "I am God"; "I have seen the face of God."

By dedicating completely in this way alone, the ego-self, the ego-personality vanishes as individual waves vanish in the ocean. And having experienced this kind of identity, the apparent 'duality,' the sense of 'you and I' also vanishes. Where there is no 'I' different from 'you' or 'him,' there is no sense of describing anything as 'mine.'

Thus love leads to that divine, sacred, singular sense of Oneness where stands no second. It is Oneness without loneliness; seclusion without discrimination; fullness that fears no reduction or loss.

I recall a certain teaching of the Zen:

All lives in essence is the Buddha,
No water, no ice.
All ice is water.
No Buddha, no Life.
All Life is the Buddha.

(NBS: 43-46)

Gita says:

Viviktasevi laghvaashi
yata Vak-kaaya maanasah
Dhyaana yoga paro nityam
Vairaagyam samupaashritah...

Again the Gita commands: *Vivikta-desha sevitwam, arati-r-janasamsadi*. Again and again the emphasis for the devoted man is on *vivikta-desha-sevitwam*, i.e., love for seclusion which Thoreau also emphasises.

In the love treatise of what has been described as the Brindavana Leela (Leela = mystic gambols), the epitomized Bhakti figured as Radha (the devoted spirit), is always found to seek her beloved Kanha or Govinda within a secluded bower (*kunja*) far away from the madding crowd. This is symptomatic of the true way of nurturing divine love, i.e., Bhakti. Seclusion is an essential factor in the growth of emotional as well as spiritual conjugality.

The fruits of divine love grow in places where distractions from crowd are totally absent. God loves to love in His utter singleness, in his secret cove, far away from the theatre of life drama.

Tagore repeatedly has sung in the same vein: "I shall hide you within my inmost heart; and none shall see, measure, or share our dalliance." In the Vrindavana sports of the Lord of all Loves, the imaged ideation and parable is always present: the Lord and the Beloved spirit away from the common view deep within the secured grove where none is present to watch the divine commune.

Ramakrishna, in his spiritual ecstasies, used to sing: "Mother, only you, and you alone, will keep me company in my secret moments, and may there be no other eyes watching." Love flourishes when away from the mundane, from the dry gaze of the curious. Love does not hesitate to uproot all social ties, and be itself. Love's jealousy does not suffer exposure.

How to do this appears to be a great problem. The first step, of course, is to find a place where there is loneliness and seclusion. The next one is to cut away all types of diverting ties. No relationship is too dear to be cut away, even rooted out when the stake is divine love, divine redemption, love eternal and Elysian bliss.

To this kind of renunciation, one has to be above the three *gunas*, the three innate bonds which have been described before. This means that in pure divine love, as St. Augustine confirms and St. Theresa describes, even an attachment for the qualitative excellence and purity has to be regarded as an attachment nonetheless.

All attachments involve a 'second', some kind of 'anotherness.' This would not assist in experiencing pure *anandam* or divine consummation. Infused with ecstatic love, we sing like Tagore: "You and I; no other fascination, no other ties; the world is all open and free for this Union."

"I wanted Power, and God kept me imprisoned on a
throne;
I wanted Love, and God awarded me the freedom of the
World."

Such a brave soul faces every kind of sacrifice.

In fact, no sacrifice to him/her is too dear to be abandoned behind. He abandons both *yoga* and *kshema*; both here and hereafter. He cares neither for salvation, nor for profit. If liberation means separation from God, the Bhakti-adept does not hesitate to get away from liberation too.

No other power can exert any greater pressure on the practice of Bhakti or divine love than the personal sense demands: hunger, thirst, sleep, sex, fear, anger, ego, greed, etc. And a soul inspired and driven by love and its quest stands naked alone under the broad sky with no care at all for these commands of the body and the mind (NBS: 46-47).

Thus the soul in love keeps away from the fetters of action and reaction. No act of the soul in love addresses the world around. All his actions are addressed to that one point: unflinching love for the Lord.

Naturally, life makes no demands on the love-creature, and the love-creature makes no demand on life. This is found to be the only way to avoid the cycles of action and reaction. The divine lover loves to seek freedom, liberation within the function of life that is fully dedicated 'to serve the divine purpose.' He abandons all other cares, all other ties, all responsibilities, all fears from criticisms.

Even the injunctions of the Vedas cannot bind him and force him to the rituals of sorts. He alone tastes. Love in its fullness is tasted only by those who cover themselves with love without any care for the world outside (NBS: 48-49).

Thus a divinely inspired lover secures liberation through love, and leads the world around towards perfect liberation. Such were the examples set by a Buddha, a Jesus, a Meerabai, a Teresa and a Ramakrishna (NBS: 50).

Love Gentile: Love Supreme

How does it feel when you are in love? Painful? But would you part with it? Ecstatic? But would you share it? Share with whom? How?

Love is selfish. Love is unsharable. Love is liberal, and the world can be gifted away for retaining it. Love is selfish, and will throw away all demands, relationships, cut through all silken bonds, and break through all secreted treasure troves.

Asked to describe, it is beyond words. It is asking a mute how does the cake taste. It is complete in itself, yet leaves something to be gained. It is the ultimate in satisfaction.

Yet a painful longing eternally squeezes the core of all feelings.

Yet the heart in love exudes a beam of ethereal contentment, while the lover/beloved longs for some yet-to-be-achieved bliss. It is acheived, almost; yet not achieved fully.

Love is a process of pursuit; and could not be claimed as 'achieved'. This gap between achieved and not achieved is where Love abides for the consummate. "The gaping separation keeps me away from Thee; and I feel baffled to bridge the gap..." (Tagore). Only the blessed ones find fullness of contentment in love (NBS: 51-53).

Pashya bata-taror-moole
Briddaah sishyaah guru-r-yuvaa;
Guru-r-mookava-d-sinah
Sishyaa-s-tu chhinna-samsayaah.

Watch under the banyan tree;
the teacher is young and sits mute.
The disciples listening to the Guru mum,
have their questions fully answered.

This represents a great scene of communication through a mute correspondence as there existed between the young Shankara, supreme teacher, and his matured and old disciples who absorbed the solutions of the mystery of life-and-death through a muted correspondence.

Love is an experience of inner feeling.

It is unqualitative, undesiring, waxing moment by moment. It is dainty and delicate, perpetually flowing, attainable through feeling and feeling alone. "Oh for a life of feelings, rather than of thoughts," cried poet John Keats.

The man in love finds his love in every grain of sand, in every blade of grass, in every heart, in every being. The birds sing of his love; the ripples murmur his love. In the rustlings of the forest winds, he listens to what his love tries to say. The many splendoured life, spreading fascinatingly the mystically attractive feathers of an unseen peacock, makes a much deeper impact on him than can be imagined by a common rustic who lacks in feeling. Aesthetically moved sense-involvements in life involve all phases of nature and life: sights, sounds, heart throbs and tears, each oozing the love one bears to the supreme Beloved (NBS: 54-55).

This state is attainable only through complete identification. As long as the lover and the beloved are viewed as two, love is not matured. Radha is the eternal example, and Meera Bai. Radha reprimanded her friends: "How can Krishna leave Gokul as long as I am here. He is within me, a part of me. He is and shall be wherever I am!": Love is where the beloved is (the Beloved`s intense expectation is Love's eternal home).

Meerabai's remonstrances were of a similar nature. She had snubbed the great spiritual Vaishnava Roopa Goswami who would not grant an interview to a 'woman', thinking a member of the opposite sex nothing but a kettle of troubles. Meera, the saint, reacted. "I thought", she said "that no life is independent of the love of the Lord; and the Lord alone prevails. Where then is there any difference of caste, colour, sex, ages or any other consideration? How can one have 'All in All', entertaining at the same time pockets of negative reactions? *Anandam* must be sexless."

If the *sattvic* soul loves in the *sattva*-way; so does the *rajasic* soul love as influenced by *rajas*. The *taamasa* love too is love, and is fulfiled in the *taamasic* way (as the Tantra way illustrates). The basic trait that determines these differences is the way the loving soul seeks its beloved. In order to enjoy love in full measure, one must get rid of all feelings of distinctive differences. Yasoda used to beat Govinda, the prankster, in love. The cowherds used to take him as their equal, the girls adored his companionship, and the boys felt proud of his guidance. His parents adored him as their saviour, while Kamsa held him in awe like the living Death. But he appeared as the Supreme to the sages and the gods. Each in his/her own way, of course, submitted to His glory with the greatest satisfaction of his or her soul (NBS: 56).

Divine love and mundane sensuous greed and attractiveness do not make a good amalgam. Only the wise can discriminate between the divine and the mundane. The discriminator is wisdom, but the discriminating essence, or the faculty, is constancy in love. Rooted love never suspects.

The wise alone can discriminate between the eternal values and the transitory passions. "These are the Wise, the Soul of my Soul. I am as dear to them as they are dear to me (*Aham sa cha mama priya-h*)."

Sri Ramakrishna mocked at those who used to say that God is 'there, there and there,' by pointing to the sky. He meant that God is in love, and love is the taste, the essence of the soul. A common prostitute was the image of love to the later-day-saint Villvamangal, who found his world in the voluptuous market girl. Yet so dedicated, single-minded and sublimated were his feelings for her that when she reminded him of the entire waste of his treasure of love on a street-girl instead of on the Eternal Lord, the Brahmin boy was alerted, and at once found the way to this pole-star. Villvamangal died a Saint. Any one knowing the lives of St. Augustine or of St. Catherine of Germany will appreciate the wisdom of this view.

But all the three types (already spoken of as *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*) are capable of participating in the enjoyment of love in their distinct ways, and according to the stage of the personal capacity to absorb. Of course, the love of the spiritual (*saattvic*) would be essential and perfect, compared to the love of the *taamasic*, who would still be engaged in being devoted to temples, deities, forms and disciplines.

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Abandon, abandon, and still abandon when in love. Keep love alone as your Alpha and as your Omega (NBS: 57).

Expressions of Divine Love

In spiritual quest, the progress passes through many ways. The ways differ, but the essence of love remains unaltered. Love is its own testimony, its own testament. No other proof is required to prove love. Man in profane love tastes disturbance, anxiety, even fear (of separation or share), but divine love confers confidence, peace, assurance and confirmation. Divine experience is unique in the sense that it is its own passport and proof. Since in love there remains no distinction between 'yours' and 'mine', there remains nothing for a dedicated person to claim as his own. Since nothing is claimed, nothing appears to get lost. Hence the soul remains fully contented in divine love (NBS: 57-61).

But as long as life is, duties have to be performed. Life's load is accepted once and released only once. Life bears responsibilities. And in doing duties, a sense of success or failure must disturb the mind. This does disturb. But the disturbance is experienced by those who identify their failures and successes as belonging to them, or adhering to them. Once the mind gets settled in divine love, all enterprises appear to start from the divine source, and their success or failures too seem to belong to the divine source. Then, alone, no personal joy creates elation, no personal grief causes depression. But in the running course of life, where duty has to be attended to, man must not meddle with subjects, or associations which by nature are disturbing and exciting. These create diversions which antagonise the constancy in love. These, like sex, desire, profit, or sceptic dialogues, should be strictly avoided. Self-glory, self-praise, self-esteem are poison to the spirit of dedication, sacrifice and self-immolation, without which loving is just an attitude, and not a wholesome purpose. Self-effacement is essential in love. Nurturing and having the absolute confidence that 'my God cannot betray or abandon me', is a very strong essential in confirmed love.

A story appears on some of the testaments of the Bible. This says that at a certain stage of the crucifixion, the crucified Christ, in unbearable agony, had exclaimed, "God! God! Why has Thou abandoned me?" The legend does not appear to attune with the grain of the love that Jesus bore towards God. In pain or pleasure, the soul in love reamins steady and undisturbed.

The *samaadhi* concept in the Hindu philosophy means to be above these types of physical and mental pains. Hence the Sufis, the Hindus doubt the veracity of the legend which does not appear in all the testaments of the Bible uniformly.

Of all types of dedication, a dedication of physical pain is considered to be most demanding. Even more difficult is the complete dedication of anger, or loss of temper. But even harder than that is the complete dedication of the nagging sex provocations. To root that out is indeed difficult.

My father used to tell me, "No, sex is a very creative drive, and it is nature's will that it is set to work through all lives." To suppress is to court danger and more danger. So love, love, and still more love. Not one, not many, but all. All in all: a blade of grass, a flying butterfly, a crawling insect, as much as a human child or a human being. To extend the scope of love from a person to imperson, from individuals to the universe is the most positive way of utilizing the *lhaadini*, the sex drive, with all its fascinations and ramifications.

Much later in life, I got intimate with a lady Saint, who gave me personal instructions regarding this aspect of *saadhanaa* (spiritual discipline). She, by practical lessons, led me into the rough and raw jungles of the great Tantra-continent, and showed how this Serpent Power could be brought under control through offering the same to God.

This offering must be total and egoless, totally egoless, so that the mind—relaxed—enjoys the final and sublime communion with Brahman, or God (if that term is preferred).

Much later, I came into contact with the *Confessions* of St. Augustine, and St. Teresa, and to a lesser degree, with the confession of Isadora Duncan, Leo Tolstoy and Gandhi. I was amazed to confront the struggles of these great Souls, as much as I was confirmed in the practical teachings of the old Tantra lady about whom reference has been made.

If love is strong and fixed, then all the contrary winds that sway the mind away from the love of the divine change their directions, and drive the boat of life through the ocean of temptation to the final harbour safe and sound (NBS: 62-65).

Who are the ones who fear to love, and reach near the godhead through personal efforts? Gita clearly categorizes them into three groups: (1) the hurt and distressed; (2) the seeker of material benefits; and (3) those who are in doubt, and seek solutions to their mental problems.

Gita also has categorized how love is tinted by the three *gunas* (56 ante). Then Gita says that true love belongs to those who love beyond the limitations of the three *gunas*. Love does not flourish in fetters. Love needs freedom for its growth. Love is freedom. Feel free in love.

Those who are uninitiated in reading the messages contained in Hindu images, and consider them as mere idols, fail to see why Krishna (love) form in human shape is always seen standing in a triple-curved posture and never straight. They see it as effeminate and licentious. In fact the three-curved form images the contained ideation of the three: that is, the *Triputis* (actions, cause of action, and the instruments of action already discussed); the three *gunas* and the three types of mind which seek the closeness of divine love. The ways and forms may differ, but the one goal of divine love remains supreme in mind and thought.

Thus divine love, God's own blessing, affects the seeker directly by conferring on his nature a peaceful grace, so that a God-man (woman) moves with an aura of peace and tranquillity. Once the mind is settled and fixed on confirmed reciprocation, the soul is at peace with itself, and it spreads peace all around.

The second category of God-love expresses itself through submission and service. To serve the beloved becomes the supreme pleasure of the devoted soul.

Ramakrishna had his disciple 'Latoo' set apart for this great quality of constant attendance. Narada says that, in offering close and intimate personal service, the distance between individuals is more easily narrowed than can be imagined. Service opens the door of closer knowledge. Not through self-chastisements, and arduous practices, is God realized as through loving dedication and service. In this connection, one is reminded of a saying by Shree Chaitaya, the great Saint: "Consider me as your humblest servant, O my dearest Love. Let me serve you even as the minutest grain of dust under your feet, so that I keep nearest to your presence."

Tagore's prayers exclaim, "With my Life, with my Death, with my joys, with my sorrows, in all states of my fortunes and misfortunes, let me hug to your feet; and do not remove them away." In another prayer he says, "Just leave a little space by your pedestal for me to sit, wait and serve."

The third category of the loves of God seek His close association as a bosom friend. In the Gita, several times Sri Krishna speaks to his devotee Arjuna, "I am confiding in you this Truth because you love me, and I love you as a friend!"

Even Jesus claimed obedience and faith from his followers: "You are my friends; and do as I tell you...I expose unto you, as my closest friends, whatever I learnt from my Father!"

This love for God is expressed through the affection the mother bears to her child. Yasoda's intimate closeness to the baby Krishna has been imaged into the figure of the Madonna all over Christendom. To watch at the painting of Raphael's Madonna is to watch the bliss of God in a special relationship. The Hindus keep on their altar the figure of baby Krishna crawling to reach his ardent-lovers and their embraces.

Song of Solomon cries, "Let me kiss the honeyed lips of my Beloved," and St. John on the Cross cries in agony, "In the flower bed of my breast there is room only for Him, where my Beloved rested in heavenly peace."

Even a true friend and a seeker often gets annoyed at the literary 'images' the saints use in describing the intensity of their love for, and more intense love in, their union with their Beloved. The graphic descriptions in terms of body-play and mental voluptuousness obviously disturb their equanimity of mind.

Human language is bedevilled by familiar images associated with the erotic and the mundane. When the same language is used for describing the Divine Union, my friend's sensitive susceptibilities, the howlings of his "apperceptive-mass" (projected ideas from accumalated experiences) prevent him to get above the mundane, and reach for the sublime. A case of misplaced idealism!

When St. Teresa exclaims, "I experienced consummation last night. I got etherially voluptuous in His love for me"; or when Radha says, "My bodice got torn to pieces, my girdle came loose, and my breast and thighs thrilled at the touch of his body", my friend gets out of his self control, and vehemently denounces the use of profane language (and images) in describing the sublime. [Obviously my poor friend has not tasted the hot punch of the 'Song of Songs'.]

He has yet to wait. and cleanse his subconscious secret chambers before the lights could be switched on. The mind is a hungry monster of the dark chambers; and often gets excited like a famished grizzly bear who has seen a painted deer jumping on the walls. When shadows come alive to sick minds, the truth with Love's effulgence seek a back seat. Love Divine is attainable to a soul cleansed of fear, shyness, resentment and shame. Fear from shadows keeps the mind away from the central light. The Divine is a clear experience, and the experience itself acts as a Divine cleaner.

The divine is attainable through love alone, not through years of arid intellection.

Feel! Feel!! Feel!!! Leave alone logic and arguments. Love the Lord with all your Heart and feeling. He will be yours.

In explaining this relationship, the depth and nature of this love, often eyes fill with tears and the voice gets choked, for it is extremely difficult to explain and express this kind of intense love. "It is in vain you ask me to describe this love. The more I try to describe, the more overwhelmingly the feeling envelopes me," says the Saint Vidyapati's Radha.

The body gets tense, hairs stand on end, and nerves experience waves of thrill. And such love, and such a lover, feel so inspired with the consummate charge of feeling that the intensity does no longer remain personal. Its radiation reaches his parents, his friends, his society, even his country; and the entire mankind becomes aware of such a divine compact. This is no story, no wishful thinking. It happened to the Buddha, Zarathustra, Hazrat-Muhammad, Sri Chaitanya, Guru Ramdas, Guru Nanak, and scores of others.

Their tales are sung at later times as epics. The dust they treaded on became holy pilgrimages. Their acts even now guide us as examples; and their sermons are later quoted as holy scriptures.

If you love, you are saturated. If you love, you lose your identity. If you love, you learn to dare, dare and dare. No path is too hazardous to reach Him. No offering is too dear to be sacrificed. No cacophony of the bazaar whispers and gossips deter the determined from reaching the Lord. He is mine only when I become Him (*So-'ham: Aham Brahmaasmi*).

There ceases all discriminations of caste, education, beauty of form, distinctions of class, wealth, power, or of forms of occupation and nature of work.

By staking 'A-L-L' alone, the devotee gains God's grace.

Never enter into discussions and debates regarding your love for God; because debates and polemics prove nothing. Truth resides in feeling the Truth, and suffers no witness or expression. It is subjective, and can only be realized. Debates end in futile egocentric waste.

Follow the guidance left by the Realized, the Adepts, the Saints. And according to the instructions left, follow the way of active participation. Till the end is reached, never rest on the oars, for the journey is long, and suffering is the price.

No rest, no sloth, no looking back until desire, passion, anger and diversions created by inner nerves and outer sense organs are completely subdued. The intensity of this love for God must become so forceful as to be able to wash away all diversions, and bring the world within the reach of your touch, and present the world beyond as a brilliant effulgent reality of bliss and peace.

Time tempts. Efforts cut through that temptation.
Every moment drives towards the Divine.
No moment is too insignificant to be passed by.
Love for God is the only love to be cultivated.
(NBS: 66-82)

3

DHYAANAABHAASA-VASHEEKRITENA MANASAA
TAN-NIRGUNAM NISHKRIYAM
YOTIH KINCHANA YOGINO HI NITARAAM
PASHYANTI PASHYANTU TE
ASMAAKAM TU TADEVA LOCHANA-CHAMAT-
KAARAAYA BHOOYAAT CHIRAM
KAALINDI-PULINESHU YAT KIMAPI TAT
NEELAM MANO-DHAAVATI

—MADHUSOODANA SARASVATEE

Let them who may do so contemplate and meditate on the immanent and the quiet. These have brought their mind under control through meditation, but my dear heart always runs unfettered towards that blue beauty who plays along the banks of the (river) Kalindi, and bestows inner pleasure that soothes the mind.

Chapter Three

THE RELIGION OF LOVE

I

Narada's was not the only set of aphorisms on the subject of love as a part of religion, or Bhakti in short. Between the Greek interlude in India in the 4th century BC and the advent of the Persians, 9th century AD, the entire Middle East had been thrown in a state of agitated turmoil so far as the spiritual lives of the peoples of these parts were concerned.

The catastrophic changes brought in the lives of the people of the Medes, especially of Mesopotamia and Iran, by the sweeping Greek influence (BC 4th century to 2nd century), made the people of these regions think anew about the spiritual basis of life in general, and of their own lives in particular.

The acutely alert and emotive geographical area in which such strong religions as Zoroastrianism, Atharvanism, and worship of Gods like Baal, Marduk, Isis, Athena, Apollo, Mithra, Artemis or Ishtar prevailed, people could not have survived without some spiritual sustenance which could respond to their emotional requirements. It is easy to bring down ruination and disaster to an established mode of spiritual exercise through the forces of terror and blood bath, but it is quite a different question to totally destroying the rooted faith of a nation in imaging the divine in a special and accustomed way. Traditions die hard, and tickle within the blood flow of the subconscious.

At one time, it was hoped that the emerging faith of Islam (6th century AD) would fill up the emotional gap. But the rigidity of the codes in Islam handicapped the liberal pre-Islam spiritualists. These were the divine dervishes, roaming mendicants who preferred living in the ecstatic sublimity of a mystic love for God. Such ecstatic living with God filled them with the joy of living and they eagerly and intensely sought to find that kind of joy in the closest company of the divine, the ultimate source of ecstatic joy. They imagined that they belonged to God.

The required tone of such mystical relationship looked for a closer bond between man and his God. This bond was found in love, in *fana*, a word of Arabic origin which means total submission to the point of extinction, if so required, in order to achieve the objective of securing divine love. The word *fana* has added a new word to English dictionary: fanatic, a person ready to lose his own identity for the love he bears to another, or to a cause. *Fana* is total submission to the point of extinction.

With the progress of Islam in India, the intoxicating idea of *fana* too had entered the land. Some of the earliest of the Islamic rulers in India chose to follow this novel way of taking joy in the mystic company of God. Although the more serious Ulemas, the Muslim divines, resented this form of Islamic innovation, because of royal patronage, the diehards were forced to keep their mouths shut. A large number of followers of the court, as well as a big chunk of the population at large, especially those who had quite recently been forced to embrace Islam against their free will, delighted in embracing a form of art of universal love for an almighty and loving God. Human love alone was supposed to respond to the divine spirit of love.

The people of all of Medes, Persia, Arabia and Mesopotamia, were at this time swinging in the ecstatic lilt of the profundly touching Sufi poems. Great allegories were written during this period. The beauty and appeal of these poems, and their spiritual content, made a worldwide impact. Many translations in many languages of the rich Sufi literature such as *Shah Nama, Shiri-Farhad, Shohrab and Rustam, Gule Wakawali, Laila Majnun,* etc. became popular household readings. People thus found themselves drunk in the lilts of the *Rubaiyats of Omar Khayam, Hafiz,* and *Jalaluddin Rumi.*

Similar literature and lyrics began to appear in the many languages of the Indian peninsula, and a completely new form of religion overwhelmed the land.

Not only historical but social reasons were also in favour of the spread of the religion of love known as Bhakti, or Bhagavatism, which since then has assumed an outstanding position in Hindu orthodox religious thoughts.

One of the most notable causes for this change from Vedism to what was later known as Bhagavatism was the social disabilities imposed on the larger sections of the inhabitants by the indigenous traditional Vedic purists who, probably to secure their positions and vested interests, had socially 'debarred' the non-Vedic clans, tribes and communes from enjoying the fruits of their own labours, as well as from inter-marrying into the selected fairer communes.

Society was thus divided into caste groups of which the Brahmins were privileged as the highest caste, and the Shudras as the lowest. In between, there were two more castes: the Kshatriyas and the Vaishyas, the martial rulers and the business communities, respectively. Although the Shudras who formed the lowest rank, suffered from many disabilities, the most suffering of the lot were the vast majority who fell outside the four recognized social groups, and lived no better an existence than the monkeys and bears in forests. These were the wretched *Antye-vasis*, who were outcastes. In fact they preferred to keep away from the outrageous stratagems of these so-called higher castes.

They had no lands of their own. They worked the lands that their more fortunate 'brothers' possessed, in exchange of petty doles they received for their labours. Otherwise they loved the lives of the primitives, on what they could pick from the woods, or dig out of the earth, for their survival.

Man is essentially an animal that adores freedom, personal as well as group or clan freedom: freedom of movement, of opinions, of marriages, homes and social norms. When this freedom of food and shelter, of means of subsistence and inter-relations, is forcefully restricted under duress, man revolts. So dear does he consider this valuable sense of freedom that he is ready to sacrifice everything for protecting his rights: right of home, property, family and means of living, i.e., a natural human dignity within its social frame.

Under the tyrannical Brahmanical order, all these essential rights for a commune to live happily were denied to the fourth and the less than fourth categories of the Vedic and Pauranic Indian society.

When they were looking for an escape from the social disadvantages, the foreign interference came as their only source of rescue. First came the Greeks, and then the Islamic hordes. Principally, the last of these two had appeared for ravaging and looting the vast treasures amassed in and around the temples of the Hindu faith, even more vast resources of an extremely fertile land. The experience of plundering the great Zigguurats of Mesopotamian culture, as well as the Egyptian temples, made the attackers both bold and rapacious. Temples were viewed by them as treasure holders, and they fired direct on these as sitting ducks. Their source of inspiration was wealth, not religion.

The world had never seen such upheavals as those which overwhelmed the human society between the fourth century BC and the tenth century AD. That period of a thousand years saw the mighty fall of the Persian empire and the sweep of the Islamic religious fervour taking over the entire Middle East. It was during this period that the Indian frontiers fell to pieces through the series of alien attacks. With the fall of the great Hindu resistance, new ideas swept over the land. The age-old ancient caste structure was severely tested by a new wave of brotherhood and equality, and a completely new idea of one God for all men, without any special priestly class over ruling the conscience of men with a series of ritualistic encumbrances.

This idea of one God for all men without any discrimination stood in sharp contrast to all that the religious lives of peoples of the Middle East, Egypt and India had been hitherto exposed to. The change was so radical and so novel that the very sweet simplicity of the creed charmed quite a number of the most pious savants of the time.

This was a religion of love which the mystics of the time sang about, dedicating their entire lives for the propagation of a simpler and more appealing religion.

These highly metaphysical thinkers of the Oriental ancients dived deep into the fathomless oceans of divine presence, and discovered that the only God that ever existed actually resided in the deepest recesses of the love of man. God, as they divined, was accessible through the love of Man for Man, and the best way to reach that love was to discover its presence in the hearts of all other lives, man and beast included, not ignoring even the minutest of lives.

It has been noticed that the economic law of increasing and diminishing returns operates effectively in the progress of the history of culture and religion. The world has been witnessing the excesses and atrocities, the degenerated laws and forms of the religious orgies as obtained in Egypt, the Mediterranean countries, Mesopotamia and Persia.

All these cultures, in the name of God, indulged in unthinkable rituals on the strength of some unverifiable dubious authority, ably supported by force. In polemics and debates the most effective arguments are provided by the might of brute force.

Yet the religions flourished under the patronage of the powerful combine of the royalties and the priests of the time and of the region. Through the beneficent efforts of the vested interests, the authority and power of the priests became so overwhelming that the entire economy of the country fell into their hands. Well, what happened was what was plan-wise intended.

And yet these totally immoral forms were eulogized in the holy scriptures of the times, and the respective holy scriptures accepted such blasphemies as pious undertakings in the name of God.

A change was overdue. The laws of history never tolerate a perpetuity of social atrocities. The answer came from a young spiritual leader who not only declared a revolt against the system, but who came forward with a virile and practical answer which hailed the message of the one and only God, a God who can be approached only through personal prayers without any fanfare, and without any intervention from such intermediaries as priests. This direct and convincing message so enthused the over-wrought population, driven to the extremities of poverty and degradation, that a sweeping movement in total revolt established a religious empire of a magnitude never before noticed in history. The popular expression was so loud and final that, within a period of less than five hundred years, well established principalities—even empires—fell down like nine pins before a tornado.

This was what has been described in history as the revolt of Islam. From the Atlantic Ocean to the reaches of the Bay of Bengal, in one fell sweep within a period of five hundred years, the flag of Islam was flying in all the powerful lands, with dominating religious forms. In no time at all, the virile and irresistible move brought the people to their knees, singing aloud the praises of the one and only God. For bringing that worship to the notice and care of the Almighty, no paraphernalia had to be arranged, no priests had to be invoked, no offerings were called for except the purity of the devotees' hearts.

The very directness, independence and simplicity of the format of the prayers brought vast multitudes to their knees, and Islam became the religion that dominated the known world of the time. That devotees looked forward to simpler and direct forms of prayers to a divinity of their choice, and within their simple understanding without any intervening agency, became obvious from the following it commanded within so short a time.

'Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.' The quick and devastating, overwhelming and absolute hold of Islam over half the population of the known world at the time, in defiance of all the established and powerful faiths, led the military leaders of the holy movement to inevitable mutual fisticuffs, and desire for domination. In spite of the simplicity of the religious format itself, which held on, the leaders of the movement fell slave to the temptations of domination, torture, loot and compulsive tyrannies. Greed for more wealth and more power broke open the hidden cells of weaknesses of human nature, which always work havoc even with the best of intentions.

It takes tremendous strength of character of the strong and the successful to withstand temptations from power and wealth. The great Islamic dream fell to pieces under the pressures of the temptations of imperialistic ambitions. Despite the degeneration, however, essential spiritualism innate in Islam was nursed by some rare souls, and these gave mankind a new direction.

In Baghdad and around the land washed by the Euphrates and the Tigris, some saintly and godly individuals spoke of God the Intimate, of God the Lover, of God the

Love in Spirit residing in every life and every individual being as the very soul of all mysteries. The mystic love for God was imaged as a beckoning lamp in an area of darkness, and the soul seeking God as the only home for peace and love, was imaged as a moth ready to lay its life with the hope of embracing the Burning Flame that sheds Light, and drives away darkness.

The Sufis, as they were called from their strictest adherence to cleanliness and love for white attires, believed in love. Their total attachment to love and love alone developed in them an attitude towards life which was tempered with a special kind of humility and endearness. This made them very popular and very convincing. Sufis grew into a small but well accepted and admired lot. They were regarded as Children of the Spirit, the Connoisseur of the Essence.

We have already seen how this new brand of the God-loving spiritually inspired Sufis caught the imagination of the common mass in India, who had traditionally been inheritors of an inborn hunger for spiritual contentment. Mysticism throbbed deep within the vitals of Indian Spiritualism. We have also seen how that quest was exploited by a section of the greedy in order to amass personal power through religious and social legislation. The religious break work as an effective stratagem for the greedy for their hoarding, the lecherous for their license, and for the paranoia for their brutal show of strenght (Taimur, Chengiz, Nadir, Attila etc.).

We saw that the miserable and deplorable situation was checked by Gautama Buddha, whose ministrations broke away the bondage of Brahmanism, and its rigid system of keeping powers in the hands of only a small group of people who enjoyed their special rights through hereditary concessions.

Under the Buddha's influence, for the first time in Aryan history, all the people assembled in the name of spiritual ministration, irrespective of caste restrictions, and mixed in togetherness without bar or hindrance. While Buddhism had opened the door of a liberal social sense of 'all men, all brothers,' Brahmanism resurged, under the protection of the imperial powers, as led by the Brahminical purism of Shankaracharya (788-820). The re-established Brahmanical movement brought back the miseries that incapacitated a major percentage of the population of the Indian subcontinent as untouchables and the fifth caste.

Recent researches of history, formed out of material evidence, reveal the truth that the people of the so-called Golden Age of India had indeed been living like ants and bees, as the onion-eating miserable builders of the Pyramids had been doing. The grandeur of such achievements as the temples of Haleibid, Belur, Mt. Abu or the iron pillar of Mehrauli were polished by the bones of people who had been considered as the lowest specimens of human beings—not worthy of a house, or education, or a plot of land, or even social recognition for their skill. Hands that were good enough to carve the beautiful images were not considered pure enough to offer prayers in the very temples they helped build.

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This was excellent material for easy conversion. And this was, for the suffering mass of the lowest category, an easy and heaven sent escape into the protective arms of the new conquerors who admitted of no caste restrictions.

The rushing surge of Islam in India, however, did not appear as a simple proselytizing mission. Its appearance seems to have been inspired by the wealth of the land. The conqueror, when gorged with wealth, got tired of the annual expeditions, and appointed a slave (Kutabuddin Aybek) for ruling the land 'on their behalf' in exchange for an annual subsidy.

But the question of conversion in India has to be seen through economic and social glasses also. Only then shall it be realized that by embracing Islam, most of the downtrodden of the society were seeking a release from the bonded incapacities of ages and ages of misery, mostly imposed by a Brahmanic system of economical rights, and hierarchical superiority. (Whether the race to conversion did raise them to a higher status ultimately is quite a different question.) The economic system of feudalism raised the crop of poverty. It was there in the system. But in Islam, even theoretically, equality of man was recognized in prayers, which was denied otherwise in the Hindu system.

After the Buddha attempted to lead the Indian mind away form the Brahmanical *yajnas*, the people of the land seemed to have found a way out of the tyranny of caste. The cultivation of the ancient Tantric form of worship and living, as noted before, gave the Buddhist movement to come out of the caste. This had been the primordial way of the Mother worship, where all the children of the Mother were treated as one family. Both Tantricism and Buddhism aimed at giving the society an opportunity of living in togetherness without any caste restrictions.

Although Vedanta, and especially Shankara's exposition of it, insisted on accepting all as one, and one as all, Shankara could not help establishing and invigorating the system of caste in spite of Tantricism and Buddhism, both of which aimed at removing restricted participations in matters of religious faith and practices.

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This was the state of affairs in the ninth century BC, a little more than a hundred years after Islam came and swept out all the old forms of worship from all societies stretching from the Mediterranean to the Ganges, and reaching out to even distant Malaya and Java. The soul of India was seeking some kind of spiritual impetus which could have assured the people of living in togetherness, in love of each other, at least in the name of one God. In God's house, they hoped, discrimination would not be tolerated. Putting up with the arrogant religious faith of the conquerers acutely tormented the conscience of the people. Forcing equality down the gullets, under threats of compulsion and death, robbed equality of its natural charm.

The distressed people held on to a silver lining in the massive clouds. Along with the Islamic intervention, the idealism of the Sufis spread over the land (14th century). The soul of India was kept ready to receive even the faintest hope of escaping the humiliating process of forced conversion. The people looked forward to some form of escape from this tyranny. The Sufi sages and the Sufi saints provided it. Even today, the least known Sufi tombs draw worshippers, admirers, and participants from all sections of the Indian public. Islam offered no bar to the Sufis to fraternise equally with non-Islamic people.

And the Pancharatras, a system derived from a Kashmir concept of divine dedication, gave a new start. The Pancharatras established a sect of Bhagavatism and preached love of man as a form of loving God. Books containing aphorisms on the subject of divine love like Narada Bhakti Sutra, and Shadilya Bhakti Sutra, analysed the contents of divine inspiration crystallized in the spirit of love as a means of total dedication. In the great epic Mahabharata also we have special chapters like Sanatsujatiya. The Bhagavat Gita, dealing with the philosophy of love of God and man as the final way of getting free of the bondage of life and death, is contained in the same epic.

During the days of the first Turko-Afghan rulers of Delhi, especially during the times of the world famous saints like Moiuddin Chisti, Saiyad Hamadani of Kashmir, Salim Chisti, Hazrat Nuruddin, Hazrat Nizamuddin the cult of all-love was being preached through the idealism of clean and open living, living in perpetual union with God through songs and dances, and offering the best in the soul to the supreme beloved that was God and God alone. It was spiritual fervour at its purest, cleanest and highest. It was a haven for proletariat aspirations.

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The popular mind of India always conveted for some tangible representation of the God whom the people loved. This was what they had traditionally learnt from the ancient traditional (Tantra) worshippers, later from the Jaina Tirthankara worshippers, and still later from Buddhist Stupa, Chaitya and Tathagata Bodhisattva worshippers, who had evolved the mystic devotions of the Buddhistic Vajrayana form of worship.

For the common man, it was very difficult to accept the idea of the Absolute, and still carry on the daily chores of life and its demands. Therefore, they appreciated the itinerant singers like the Sufi saints, the Bawuls and the mendicants who called them the Vairagis, i.e.'the unattached homeless ones.' They loved to love their gods and sing and dance for them, together with the others who also could dance and sing of the same God.

It was alright to sing of God, dance about in his name, bring the population around in one ecstatic frenzy, and get lost in the maddening flight of God-getting. It was alright to equate the divine joy and the thrill of total merging in the state of an ecstatic dip within the holy well of divine Love. It was alright to forget the sores and wounds of direct living through the built up excitement of a form of metaphysical neo-Platonic delight, and to secure a sense of climbing up to the realms of divine frenzy.

But the physical man, the man restricted on all sides by the agonies of the body, of the senses, of the dire demands of the flesh and the everyday breath, for him to get down to the realities and call a spade at some hour of the day, was absolutely necessary. Man gains confidence to watch a light glow in his soul. That he calls worship, a prayer of love and intimacy.

The world of food, shelter and clothing, the world of hard cash and market dealings, cannot be ignored too long especially through the obvious nonsense of mere clappings of hands, and steps of dances.

The contradiction was too glaring. Yet when the same sceptics looked at the frenzied mass delighting in the name of God, and forgetting themselves into the drunkenness of the loving name, the sceptics had to stop and think. They had to divine some kind of logic at work behind the magic of mass fascination, community frenzy, total participation, and total submission (*prapatti*).

And then the sensitive Hindu thinker presented his answer, his solution, his reply. He had to meet the demand. There must have been, he divined, some kind of *leela prapancha,* a mystic cycle of sportive action of the cosmic design behind the phenomenon which drove millions towards the frenzied zeal known as Bhakti, the nectar of love for God.

And that mystery, that magic answer to all the obvious changes of body and mind in the name of God, was eventually solved. The great answer was hit upon. The sages had done it, and guided the mass who were too inquisitive to find the answer.

It was to get rid of all ego, even the ego of being in search of one's own means of subsistence. To get rid of the ego, and then lie naked in and out, silently and absolutely, soul and body, to the final surrender to the Beloved One: that was the way, the salvation for the web of his tortuous process called life, and grasp the sweetness that the life-process has to offer. Love for all without ego for the self.

The Hindu thinker discovered the Truth. He declared that the essentials of life having been provided for, it would only be too greedy for man to look for yet another pinch of extra comfort of the extra little.

The mystical extent of that little 'extra' has not yet been measured, and yet that seemingly little extension of self-bound desire leads man gradually and imperceptibly, but inexorably, to the doors of hellish disaster. The present having been provided for, it would be foolish to try to look into the dark unknown of the future, and attempt to provide against imaginary disasters which come pouring even when not asked for.

Man must learn the Truth that the present comes out of the womb of the future unseen, and the future was imbedded deep when the past had emerged as the present. Yes, a riddle. But the Mahabharata says that the secrets of the highest order are hidden in what one could interpret as the 'duties' in life: *dharmasya tattvam nihitam guhayaam*.

The foolish and vain sense of security of having the ability to protect against the unseen, to provide for the wrath of time, was crystal clear to the Hindu mind. The Hindu found that the best answer to the problems of life lies with time itself, and with what we call God—the Provider of all providers. That is the only answer, the only one, and the most dependable one.

The answer, unfailing answer, is to love. Love God, and God will love you. For God is incapable of ignoring the calls of sincere love and absolute submission. Love that dedicates all, love that empties all, love that lies naked in prostration and submission as the baby does in and out of the womb of the Mother. Love alone is the supreme guarantee for all kinds of provision, provisions for all life and even beyond. The answer to darkness is light. When the future is dark, when the great insistent tomorrow peers as a demon out of the world of the dark unknown, the light of the Lord alone is the sure guide.

II

The question that loomed large in the minds of the devotees was whether God is to be worshipped in his abstract concept. If God is nothing but love, and love is a sentiment to be realized, then God is a subject for realization and not subject to sensual perception.

While the philosophers, under the influence of the Vedantists led by Shankaracharya (788-820 AD), the champion of monistic concept of God, preferred to pay their homage to God in the conceptual subjectivity as an abstract ideation, there was another sect, led by Ramanuja of Kanchipuram, who preferred worshipping God in a personalized form. The 'family' of Ramayana grew gradually, and the need for a tangible formal deity for adoration was advocated by such stalwarts as Ramanuja, Sayanacharaa, Vidiyaranya, Madhva and Ballavacharya. The deists, in establishing a formal deity as God, established Brahmanism and caste perversions again.

The question which troubled the common masses was, which one should be followed. The "Common Man" wanted to love their God, and report to Him whatever they had to report regarding the gains or losses of their lives, for by God they meant a final authority, the Supreme Court of Justice, an intimate friend to whom they could bare themselves without impunity or reserve. In their joy, they could dance with Him. In their sorrow, they could weep over his shoulders. For them, the final and the unfailing support was God.

This God they knew was to be their own, their friend and support. This was something tangible, something that they could see, feel, hug, and if so required, even love as Radha did, Mira Bai did. St. Theresa of Avila did the same in a moment of ecstasy. Did Jesus not cry to the same God in his distress, pierced by agony, and wail, "God, God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" This God, as they believed, would be their company in their daily chores, in eating, drinking, merry-making, gaming, celebrating, grieving when the occasion demanded. They had no uses for an imperceptible, abstract ideation, however correct and wise. They needed a God that they could hold on to, not one that they could only contemplate and fix in their brain. God to them appeared as an intimate emotional participant, not merely an intellectual goal. (See the opening *Smaranika* prayers of Ramanuja and Madhusoodana.)

But the sages who ran after securing the Truth behind the realities, which appeared to them as bubbles floating in the mysterious stream of Time, had something else to seek after. This was for them *paramaanandam*, the finality of ecstasy. This was a state of total freedom, emancipation, liberation of the mind, which is a storehouse of contraries, and which never is at rest with itself. They proposed to reach this state through logical analysis, proper enquiries, practising appropriate disciplinary austerities, and formal meditation as instructed by some realized sage. The common man felt confused regarding the way he should adopt and looked for some proper guidance. "How is He to be realized by those who have found their soul completely under their control?"asks Arjuna in the Gita: *katham...jneyam sah niyatatmabhih*. If for such a pastmaster as Arjuna, the choice of the path was so confusing, how could the common man suddenly decide which one would be the correct path? The Puranas say that the confusion also bothered the sage Vyasa. Man has to live just one life. In this one life, he has to invest well to not only lead this life successfully, but also to store enough assets for the succeeding lives to come. Confusion for him is therefore quite probable and understandable.

The question Arjuna puts forward suggests that knowledge through logic can be a process for clearing up doubts and establishing some facts; but mere logic is not realization. In other words, no amount of knowledge, correct or incorrect, helps the final achievement of actual consummation: 'the realization of *anandam* or bliss' which we all covet all the time with all our life. That is God. That is divine. That liberation, that emancipation, that complete freedom from the traps of the sense infatuation which we all seek, is bliss. That bliss is God.

The common man thus stood at the crossroads: to go for that bliss through the forms of worship, through adoration of a personal God, or through the rigours of impersonal, abstract meditation of a subjective ideation which is like chasing a black cat in a black night in a closed room packed with empty blackness. Eventually one may catch it—no denying it—but when, even if he does so?

Matters were not made easier when the Adi Shankaracharya strongly advocated in favour of Advaita, or the monistic way of self-realization. About two hundred years after Shankaracharya, Ramanuja came to propagate the value of worshipping the godhead in the image of one's beloved form of God. And after Ramanuja, in quick succession, came great spiritual teachers such as Madhva and Ballava who preached in favour of offering worship of love and submission to a divine image of a person's choice. Thus, at one stroke, the land was thrown into a confusion regarding worshipping God in the image form, as opposed to meditating on the Self for attainment of final *mukti* or liberation.

We had occasion to refer to the appearance of the Islamic, particularly of the Sufi, ideas with the progress of Islamic raids in India, and with the establishment of the rule by the Turko-Iranians. We have also noted how after the decay of Jainism and Buddhism, the influence of the proletariat and tribal Tantra had spread over the whole land. With the growth of Tantric influence, worship of Siva and of the Mother had caught the imagination of general public, inclusive of the tribals and of the people outside the pale of caste. (The ruling religious propensity of the people of Harappan culture has been found to be Tantric Paashupata Saiva cult.)

These last had very little to do with the intellectual spiritualism preached by the Brahmanical order. In fact, they grew to learn to keep away from the Brahmanical ways in which they hardly enjoyed any feeling of actual participation. Outside of the Tantric world, of the Tantric brotherhood, they were trained to consider themselves as toally unwanted and rejected. They were sorry for themselves as Asuras, Rakshasa, Pukkasa, Chandalas, Monkeys and Bears, even Serpents. These names so-called might not have truly reflected the facts but they more than reflected the Aryan attitutde to the non-Aryan sons of the soil.

In fact, since the Buddhistic times, their participation was welcome, as the thousands of architectural evidence of the Buddhist and post-Buddhist times illustrate. Hinduism owes Yakshinis, Dwarapaalas, and more importantly, the figures like Kubera, Ganesha, Nandis to these times and forms. Due to the liberalism of Buddhism and Tantricism, free adoration and admission of the rejected communities into the folds of the worshippers, which became a permanent feature of later Hindu forms.

This was their Tantra. Even cows and domestic animals were regarded as children of the same God, and received domestic attention and sympathy. For such natural participation, and for bearing basic sentiments for the gifts of nature and God, they were rejected as backwards, non-Aryans, and even most of the time as downright untouchables.

A close study of the surviving Tantric and Buddhist panels of Khajuraho, Konarak, Bharut, Ellora, Sanchi and of distant Borobodur leaves no doubt in a scholar's mind how the common classless multitude had gained admission and recognition in the flowing living life-stream of the Saiva-Tantric-Buddhist life. In contrast, the evidence in this regard in the orthodox temples draws a sad blank.

But the common devoted mass looked for acceptance, admission, cordial and social participation. If not in the highbrow society itself, then they longed for more tolerance at least in their rights to worship. They thought that only through that means could they find consoling rewards for their age-long suffering humiliation.

All that their hearts wished for was to share in the great divine joy of singing the praises of the Almighty in similar strains of absolute faith as their Sufi compeers were doing—the Sufi dervishes, a type of Iranite intinerant homeless singers of the Lord's name. The abandoned God-loving ways of the Sufis appealed to the simple folks very much. The germs of yet another religious move were thus laid.

III

The idea of building temples and worshipping images of different divinities must have struck the Indian minds from the Greeks who were present in India by the 4th Century BC. On the frontiers of India, particularly in the Turko-Iranian regions, the Greek culture had long established itself.

But the adventures of Alexander had left behind quite a large number of Greek soldiers in India. His footsore legions finally called it a day, and decided to settle in a beautiful and bountiful Indian society. These Shakas or Scythian Yavanas, had eventually become parts of the Indian soil, and through intermarriages, by the second century BC, the immigrants had become respected citizens of India.

Though the Indians were impressed with the devotional details of the Greek worshipping forms, and their Gods, especially Apollo, Minerva, Jupiter and Heracles, we find some of the Greeks too in their turn were impressed with Hindu Gods and adopted their forms.

This is evidenced by the Basenagar pillar inscription of one Heliodorus who acted as an ambassador of one of the Greek monarchs ruling just out of the North Western boundaries of India. There are evidences of temples and temple worship in the contemporary literature of the times in such books as *Brihatkatha Manjari, Katha Sarit Sagar,* etc.

Once the idea of temple worship captured the imagination of the public, who had already been fascinated by the Buddhist worship in chaityas and stupas, those who used to worship in caves and hills, by river banks, and under trees, now transformed themselves as regular temple worshippers. Soon the people joined. Temples with Gods came to stay. As these appeared, the formats of their worship also claimed their places, and came the bells, the trumpets, the songs, the dances, together with a plethora of all kinds of emotional expressions through myths and hymnals. The Greek temple forms, the Egyptian temple forms, the impressive Phoenicians, Assyrian and Iranian *zigurat* forms came to India along with their testaments and compendia.

Brahmins assumed, with the sanction and assistance of the monarchy, the religious leadership, and replaced the fire-centered Aryan yajnas with the temple centered pujas. The transformation was approved by the orthodox, as is illustrated by the Gita, which speaks of loving and ready-acceptance of the newly introduced plebeian forms of worship with 'leaves, flowers, fruits and waters' (IX-26), obviously replacing the Vedic offerings of butter, wine (soma), meat, etc. The transposition of the forms of worhip indicates also a transposition of Brahmanical partipation, i.e., elite participation by the common proletariat-mass. Worship became a popular engagement. The liberality of acceptance of heterodox elements of forms of worship has been confirmed in that memorable compendium of revolutionary Hindu thoughts, the Gita (cf. Gita: IX: 23, 30, 32).

The format of temple worship, with its priests, votaries, attendants, and marked special dates (tithis) was already in vogue. So devout was the response of the public in favour of this emotion-loaded approach to God that special dates for special celebrations were very carefully set apart by the votaries of the religion of Bhakti or love. Emotionally charged minds are often found to receive superstitious beliefs, even in their embryonic state.

Not only the Kerala sage Vaikhanasa (who might have been a non-Indian himself, or who might have represented extraterritorial trends and forms of worship), but following his way, even the great Acharyas (spiritual masters) of the South (9th to 11th centuries) accepted the elaborate format, and loudly and firmly pleaded in favour of the religion of Bhakti or the Bhagavata religion (cf. *Brihat-Kathaa Manjari; Brihaddharma Purana; Kathaa-Saritsaagara; Raaja-Tarangini*, etc.)

Both Madhvacharya (son of Sayanacharya) and Ballavacharya openly and unabashedly advocate in favour of an emotional familiarity with the Godhead through the adorable person of Sri Krishna. But their peer, Ramanujacharya of Kanchipuram, also advocated very strongly in his famous *Vishita-Advaita* philosophy the worship of Sri Rama with Sita and Lakshmana as the ultimate trio of all metaphysical representation of devotional approach to the divine.

Even Shakaracharya, the austere monist that he was, had fallen for it. The sage who had the courage to declare *aham brahmasmi* (I am the Brahman) or *Brahma satyam jagan minthyaa aham Brahmaiva naaparah* (The Brahman is the only reality. All else is false. I am the Brahman and no other) and declarations to similar vein was found to sing of Siva and Sakti. His adoration of the *Sri Yantra* in the famous hymn *Ananda-Lahari* is now a classic of deep Tantric import.

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By the 12th century, the Indian subcontinent was permeated with the inspiring zeal of the religion of Love, Bhakti, by then known as Bhagavatas or Vaishnavism. The followers of the religion of love were known as the Bhagavatas, lovers of Bhagavan, God. In temples after temples, Sri Rama, Sri Kirshna and Swami Shankara Siva were being worshipped with eclat. The Egypto-Assyrian religious format had planted its roots firmly in the soil of Jainsim and Buddhism.

Thus Brahmanism finally accepted the simple ways of the plebeian Tantra, which contained the traditionally worshipping format of the non-Brahmanic ways of prayers which partially reflected the Jaina as well as the Tibeto Buddhist approach.

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Sufism had already made its presence felt by the 11th century. It became popular at once, and had infuenced the religious sentiments of a very large section of the public who stood on the borderlines of forced Islamic conversions. It is clear to the historian that in this transformation, and against this large canvas, the Hellenic interlude with its Mediterranean tradition of temples and images too had its role to play.

The people of India had come out a long way from its strictly Vedic format. Literature and other records witness the thorough changes. No more Soma, Baji or Brisha offerings, and the associated carousals and revelries. The

Mahabharata as well as the Gita along with the episode known as *Sanat Sujaateeya,* and the *Pancharaatra* literature observe, and accept these changes. Literary and sculptural evidences in this regard abound in establishing the fact that an age of temple-worship with its fervent content had held the Indian mind in a tight grip.

Shankara's monism (Advaita) was superseded by the forceful intervention of Dualism and Qualified Dualism (*Dvaita* and *Vishishthadvaita*), where the devotee, who was not satisfied with just meditating blank on the Self or on the Brahman, hungered for emotionally leaning on, and grasping with, a very tangible presence of an emotionally sensitive God who could love, help and respond to the hungering souls of those who needed Him. Merging in the divine presence, uniting and getting lost in His identity, was the chief attraction of these intense votaries.

Finally, this religion of Bhakti, and its philosophy of devotional union, above all other considerations, took hold of a people already exposed to Tibets-Mongolian Tantric trends of emotions, Buddhist creed of equality, Jaina insistence on pure adoration, and Sufi love and intense desire for total identification. *En masse*, they fell for it.

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The people, tired of metaphysical polemics, Brahmanical abracadabra, caste divisions, subdivisions, sub-subdivisions of the labyrinth of their intricacies of laws, logic, syllogisms, grammar, astronomy and metaphysics, at last wanted to stand on steady and clean understandable grounds. They preferred the hopes and fears which even the growing arm of superstition contained, to the barren unfeeling metaphysical tours. They wanted to respond to the call of their heart and soul through devotional prayers, and dedicated submissive prostration. They accepted this as the only safe and satisfying way to divine identification.

Mere conceptual spiritualism leading to the experience of God was too high and too abstract a way for the plebeian stomach. For him, something tangible, worthy of adoration, capable of daily consultation and love was needed. This was what the common man looked for. They did not have any idea of the *Nirguna* explanation of worship. What they did understand and wanted to embrace was the *Saguna* form of adoration. This was what the later Acharyas (especially Maadhva and Ballabha) advocated. (cf. ceremonials in temples at Thirupati, Dwaraka, Kankroli, Nathadwara, Puri and Madan Mohan in Jaipur).

By the time of the Acharyas of the South (8th to 11th centuries), this form of worship was much elaborated and popularized especially because they had the opportunity to borrow from a famous sage and stalwart (of unknown origin) advocating this kind of personal and detailed form of worship. His name was Vaikhanasa. He is supposed to have lived in Kerala and from whom Ramanuja, the champion of *Saguna* Bhakti religion in the South (worshipping God in his personal form), had borrowed a lot. (Poet Kalidaas in Shaakuntalam mentions Vaikhanasa, but the formation of the name suggests it to be of Greek or Syrian origin).

Naturally the popularity of temple and image worship was more in evidence in the South, where the Jainas and the Buddhist monks had built up a large following. Apart from the famous retreat of Shravanabelagola, where Emperor Chandragupta Maurya had spent his last days, the Buddhist and Jaina monks had built great centres of art and architecture over the centuries. Most of these are found in the remote caves and hide-outs, spread all over the Andhra region, because the quiet monks wanted to be safe from the *Nirguna* fanatics. This accidentally saved them for a time from the Islamic tornado. It is probable that these places of worship were partially saved for posterity because they did not usually store any wealth that the alient attackers sought in stark reality in the name of proselytizing.

Even today, the most important temples of Hindu India are found in the South, where the three great Acharyas between themselves had made the worship of Rama, Krishna, Radha and Shiva-Parvati with Ganesh and Subrahmanyam very popular. As the corollary of the popular Acharyas and of their texts, actual treatises on *upasana*, *prapatti*, *tadgati*, as well as manuals for temple worship were prepared at these temples. The southern texts on *Saguna* form of worship are more elaborate and more popular. [It may just be mentioned here that the celebrated Hindu temples of the North, spreading from Taxila, Baramula and Kashmir to Kamarupa in Assam, inclusive of Varanasi, Mathura, Kanauj, Vikramsila, Gaya, Rajasthan, Khajuraho, Vidisha, Ujjain, Chittor, Nalanda were all raised to dust by Islamic intolerance.]

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This describes in brief the origin of the religion of Bhakti, or Bhagavata Dharma, on which important texts were written naturally near this time. We have seen one of the them—the Narada Bhakti Sutra—and partly noted the contents. But Narada was devoted to the personal aspect of the Lord. His aphorisms, which show his view, refer entirely to complete dedication to a God in the personal form, and to embrace God in undivided love and love alone. This is why Narada is so much adored by the later devotees.

But that was not the only way. Bhakti as a religious form was advocated also by those who were attached to the *Nirguna* or *Nirupadhika* way, or to the impersonal abstract concept. Since Bhakti as a religion had become so popular, and as Narada's treatise dealt with the personal immanence of the Godhead, there would inevitably exist, in a polemical culture of scholarship, a treatise contradicting Narada. This is the manual we are about to deal with, namely, the Bhakti Sutra of Shandilya.

IV

Western scholars often claim that the religion of Bhakti or love derives its origin from Christianity. This only indicates a type of prejudice on the part of certain European scholars. They, like the Jews of Palestine of old, indulge unthinkingly in such repulsive gutter mucks as remarking that 'nothing good could come out of Nazareth.' By doing so, the jaundiced scholars probably attempted to justify and polish their toally unjust inroads into unfamiliar realms.

To the modern mind, Indian philosophy means two or three silly notions about '*maya*', delusiveness of the word '*karma*', or belief in renunciation or '*tyaga*', the ascetic desire to be rid of the flesh. Even those simple notions, they commented, are wrapped up "in barbarous nomenclature and chaotic clouds of vapour and verbiage, looked upon by the natives as wonders of intellect." After a six-month tour of Calcutta to Cape Comorin, our aesthete dismisses the whole of Indian culture as pantheism, worthless scholasticism, or a mere play of words—nothing similar at any event to the profundities of Plato, Aristotle, even Plotinus or Bacon.

Dr Radhakrishnan has never been known as an emotionally disturbed scholar. But the presumptuous utterances of irresponsible scholars of the West, whose impatience with the Eastern merits and euphoria about the Western virtues, blind them entirely from seeing the glow of enlightenment of the East. This disturbed the equanimity of even sedate scholars.

Just at the moment, this author is reminded in this regard of the audacious views expressed by the German Nobel laureate Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965) regarding Hindu view of life which might have provoked Dr Radhakrishnan to write his famous book, *Eastern Religions and Western Thoughts*.

Christianity, as practised today, is no older than a mere two thousand years. Yet, essentially, it owes almost all its tenets, doctrines and spiritualistic forms to the great Asian religions such as Judaism, Mithraism, and Zoroastrianism. The very basis of early Christianity is thus deeply rooted in the philosophy and lifestyle of Asian saints such as the Essenes, who owed so much to Buddhism and Saivism.

Prejudiced scholars are eager to prove how the tenents of the Vedas and the Upanishads owed their origin to Christianity, when the age of the Vedas is assigned to a date much earlier than 5000 BC.

[The compilation of the Vedas might have taken place in almost the third millennium before Christ; but the actual composition must have spread for over two more millennium, or even more at very different and distant realms.]

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There are clear evidences in the Veda (Rik Veda I:156:2-3; VIII:98:11) of the adoration of Vishnu and Agni. Rik Veda (VIII:98:11) clearly states, "O Vasu, O Shatakratu, you have become our father; you are mother! We bow down to you." Bowing down means *pranipaata*—falling at the feet—which denotes accepting God as a persona, a personal representation.

(a) *Idam Vishno-r-vichakrame/tredhaa nidadhe padam samoodha-m-asya paamshule.*
(b) *Vishno kavyam rakshasva.*
(c) *Tad Vishno paramam padam/sadaa pshyanti soorayah/ diveeva chakshu-r-aatatam.*

But the Shevetasvatara Upanishad sings in a clear and loud voice the prayers for a personalized God, Rudra, or Shiva.

Eko Rudrah bahudhaa shakti yogaat
Varnaan anekaan nihitaartho dadhaati
Vidhaiti chaante visvam aadau sa devah
Sa no budhyaa shubhayaa samyunaktu

This is not all. There are several other similar prayers in the ancient Upanishad (4:12-17) recommending a personal approach to a strongly personalized divinity. The Katha Upanishad says, "Whom the Atman chooses, by him is He obtained; to him does he reveal Himself" (2:23). Also, "When he who is devoid of desire charged actions, through the Grace of God, who is the Supporter, sees the Paramatman's glory, then alone he gets freed from sorrow." In the Svetashvatara Upanishad, we find the uses of the word *bhakti* as well as the word *prapatti*, which means total submission or *sharanagati*.

In verse VI:18 of the same Upanishad, we come across the lines: *Yo vai Brhmaanam Vidadhaati poorvam/yo vai Vedamscha prahinoti tasmai/tam ha deva aatma-buddhi prakaasham/mumukshu-r-vai sharanam aham prapadye*. The lines clearly lean to 'prayers' to a personalized God (*Tam Hi Deva*).

Or, take, for instance, the last verse of the same Upanishad:

Yasya Deve paraa bhaktih/yathaa deve tathaa gurau
Tasyai te kathitaahy-arthaah prakaashante mahaatmanah.

The word *bhakti* has been clearly cited here, which means that even in the times of the Vedic culture, the appeal to love, devotion and *bhakti* used to be emphasized. The religion of Bhakti has indeed support from the Vedas.

Not only the Vedas, all classical authorities, at one time or another, have referred to this essential emotional approach to the unseen, but sure Almighty, whom—in our sensitive feelings—we are happy to call Father or Mother. We may call Him by any name but we also know that He is essentially only 'the One and only One'.

Through the ages, and perhaps against different context, we have known this divine sentiment as fervently exposed in such sectarian expositions as *Naaraayaneeya, Saatvata, Ekaantikaa,* or *Pancharaatra* religions. We find them mentioned and elaborated upon in the Epics as well as in the Puraanas.

We had occasion to note that the common man, brought up in the traditions of the Lokaayata Tantra and Buddhistic culture, found very little to sustain him in the real hours of emotional distress. At such critical times, their inner soul coveted to lean on some unseen God as their only friend and saviour.

Those who are familiar with the legend of Dhruva in the Bhagavata Purana know how his poor mother trained him to depend on his best friend Hari (God) "who", she said, "had no special location or address, but who could be found anywhere if properly called with confidence." That kind of faith, and that kind of complete surrender, lies at the root of the *Bhagavata Dharma*.

The 'only' God Almighty, the Subjective, the Abstract, the One with a form, the Omnipresent and the Omniscient stood beyond the concept of the common folk. Indeed, the concept stood far beyond the comprehension of the ranked people too, who perhaps prided over their better understanding. But one and all of them, at a moment of dire distress, found themselves in need of a tangible sympathetic but all-powerful Almighty God. And this was provided by the religion of Bhakti.

In their concept, and according to their belief, even He was not independent of Himself, because He was bound to His devotees as a mother was bound by imperceptible bonds to her offspring.

V

We are here to consider the *bhakti* aphorisms—the Bhakti Sutra—of Shandilya, as we have already examined the Bhakti Sutra of Narada, where the approach was essentially emotional. Shandilya has to be studied also, because he has examined the aspects of the religion of love from an intellectual and even psychological aspect. So it is worthwhile to have a closer analysis of Shandilya too.

Shandilya has divided his consideration under four cardinal headings. We do not know his date, as is usual with most of the ancient writers in India. But we are sure that there have been many Shandilyas spread over the centuries, Shandilya being a surname or a Gotra name, like Gautama, Bharadevaja, Garga or Mitra.

But our knowledge of his chief commentator, Swapneshwara, could be more definite from inferences. Swapneshwara himself has said that he is the grandson of the monarch of Gaudadesha, i.e., the country known as Bengal (then known as Banga) which covered a much larger area than the modern truncated area of West Bengal. Banga of yore, orignally comprised of the best part of Assam, the whole of the modern Bangladesh, the eastern part of Bihar or Mithila, and the northern part of Orissa. It actually included a good chunk of the jungles of Chhota Nagpur, then completely inhabited by the aborigines and the tribes.

If Shandilya's date is unknowable, we know the dates and the climes of Swapneshwara, his chief commentator. In order to understand Shandilya, knowing Swapneshwara is inevitable. We all see Shandilya with the eyes of Swapneshwara who was truly a product of his soil. His date also could more or less be correctly inferred to be somewhere within 900 and 1000 AD.

It is necessary to describe the country of Swapneshwara in order to appreciate why he had abandoned the path of the emotive Narada, and why he adopted the rigidly logical approach in his commentary in analysing such an emotional subject as Bhakti.

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The people of Bengal, who had been anthropologically analysed to have imbibed many strains of blood, were hard put at accepting anything without a thorough examination. Thus although their hearts were softened by the climatic conditions, the flora, fauna and the food which the land provided, their minds were extremely alert to accept a novel idea without considering the novelty with a thoroughness of enquiry. This made the people extremely sceptic, and yet sceptic as they were, they also were prone to be thoroughly emotive in spirit. Once the logic of an idea was found sound, they would advocate and champion it with all their zeal.

This assisted their scholars to develop a sharp sense of hair-splitting logic, which was developed in Bengal as *Navya Nyaya* or inductive logic. Thus, in explaining the mind of Shandilya, before accepting any theory, Swapneshwara adopted the time-tested logical method of classification: examples, experiments and analysis.

I. *Pramana* (Proof)

For any statement made in the Sutra, he had to search after proof or *pramana*. This had to depend on three categories: *pratyaksha*, *anumaana*, and *shabda*, which mean direct evidence, inference, and authorities (from the Vedas), respectively. Any statement that cannot stand the test of either of these, for Swapneshwara, was deemed unacceptable.

1. *Pratyaksha*: This is a proof from direct experience—direct and wholly cognisable, like a rainbow. Everyone knows that a rainbow is a temporary phenomenon which looks coloured and painted, but there is no evidence of any person,

material or instrument through which the painting could be achieved. Yet it is there. It is evident and directly cognisable. But mere visibility does not establish tangibility, as in the case of a mirage.

2. *Anumaana*: Therefore, for the reason of the presence of the rainbow, one has to depend on inference or *anumaana*, which reasons out the phenomenon of light falling on water bubbles. Or, more simply, a man knows the front part of his body, but has never seen directly his back. However, he is sure of the existence of his back by the reason of inference: if there is a front, there must be a back. Similarly, death is an inference from birth, 'here' is an inference from 'there', 'inside' from 'outside', 'front' from 'back', 'light' from 'darkness', 'today' from 'yesteday', etc. All these types of knowledge are derived from *anumaana* or inference.

3. *Shabda*: This is the third *pramana*. *Sabda* is nothing else but written authority, or authority. To the Hindu system of knowledge, the Vedas or similar sources—Vedangas, Upanishads, the Epics, the Puranas, the Brahmanas and the Samhitas—are parts of *shruti* or *shabda*, and their authority is final and irrefutable.

II. *Prameya*

The supreme subject for which *pramana* is necessary is God. The Samkhya system of Indian philosophy says that "There is no God, as there is no *pramana* for God's existence" (*Isvaro naasti pramaana-abhavat*). But if there is some desire to pray or to worship, then there must be some object of worship. At the back of all this creation, there is an order. And if there is an order, there must be some logic, some mind, some *chit* to determine and enforce that order. But a law or an order alone cannot create.

Creation being accepted, then an order, a law, an arrangement of cause and effect can be expected. When that is accepted, then some urge for creation is accepted, and with the urge, a mind, a will to create. This will, together with the material cause, involves dynamism, a power to act. This set of ideas as matter, will and power is described as *shakti*, or the *maya* of self-play, or *leela-prapancha* (the play-syndrome).

Without this *shakti*, nothing can move, not even the will to move or to create. Will itself is an expression of *shakti*. Not a blade of grass can move without it; not a dew drop can form or fall. The fire cannot burn or ignite; the air cannot stir a straw; the days and nights cannot roll; the water cannot dampen or wet.

Behind all phenomenon—whatever works, moves, acts—is this *shakti* or power to which all men pray for the last and ultimate favour of liberation from the cycle of cause and effect, *karma* and *phala*, birth, death, and rebirth. So the cyclic order moves.

Thus behind all this creation, there is and must be some will or power to move or to act. The power or *shakti* is self-willed, with none, nothing to obstruct/none, nothing to restrict its absolute freedom.

In order to make will effective, the subjective potential or will (*ichhaa shakti*) has to assume a perceptible form, when it is known to appear as an incarnation of the will. Logically enough, the incarnation has to assume a form absolutely willed by the *shakti*, appropriate to answer the necessity of the moment. And it does answer the prayers of the spiritual beings who crave for redress from unmerited misfortunes. It is in this way that the prayers of the devoted and the will of the Divine are found united. Belief is a strong healer, a firm welder.

The beings thus created by the urge of *prakriti*, i.e., by *shakti*, thus carry within even the faintest touch of the will power when it is called the *jiva* with an *upaadhi*—a definite given purpose or identity. Thus a *jiva* has a conscious identity through which it is able to act and discriminate. This last power is known as *buddhi*, or the intelligence to discriminate, to choose and select for further progress. Thus does will fulfil its purpose.

Shakti fulfils her purpose by incarnating a conscious *jiva-atman* as different from the *Parama* (the Supreme) or *Paramatman*, which is the Cosmic Divine, the Mystery, the Unknown and the Unknowable.

All this is necessary for the fulfilment of the purpose of the will, of *shakti*. Once the purpose is answered, the temporary self-play (as it were) is withdrawn. The drama closes.

Hence, the only way to get out of this cycle of birth and death, out of the fulfilment of the purpose of creating a *jiva*, is to pray, to accept devotion as a means of liberation. This is *prapatti*, *sharanam prapadye*, or absolute prostration to the ever present forces of the Cosmic Will in order to achieve liberation or the final *mukti*. Only the lucky can do so. The unlucky faces his ego and fails to see the point.

This cyclic cosmic order lies at the back of the system, the religion we now accept as Bhakti, the religion of love. In this religion, we have to appreciate the limitations of the personal choice of an individual to guide his own destiny. We have to realize that most of our efforts, and the wish for success, depend upon a Cosmic Will, the secrets of which are quite unknown, unrevealed to us. Hence, the desire to pray, to submit, to surrender and love. The ignorant, the fallen, the innocent, but also the prostrated, deserve sympathy, love, and grace.

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The big question is how are we to be constant to this kind of total prostration, total surrender, total love? Man has the vanity of being rational. Under the imagined pressure of that assumed rationality, man is often heard to be said that, as a rational being, he cannot just submit to prayers, especially to an assumed power, a fate, a destiny. How can reason prostrate before the unknown? The question of a physical misdemeanour before an unknown power appears to them too humiliating a nonsense.

How very presumptuous, very egotistic is such a stand, entirely based on vanity. Oh, the vanity of all vanities, i.e. total reliance on reason and reason alone.

Man, when engaged in winning the heart of another person, throughout life depends on adjustment and compromise. Throughout life, in order to achieve something creative, man has to dramatize and imagine, make the unreal appear as real. In spirit and fact, the unlucky ego-laden man has to pull the eternal Real out of the shifting Unreal, which plays the beguiling role of the Real! This Unreal is the *samsara*, the *moha*, the *maya*.

The vanity of absolute reliance on rationality and rationality alone sounds as mere tawdry and tinsel to one who believes in deriving pleasure in embracing one's own child, falling in love with one's own poems and paintings, or chasing a girl beyond the pale of marital oaths when driven by the sting of true love (Jane Eyre). How much of man really depends on reason?

Michelangelo is supposed to have hammered on the knee of his creation, Moses, and cried out, "Why don't you speak?" even before Michelangelo, the unknown artist of Pygmalion's statue, cried out and wondered why the marble could not love him? How flimsy is the role of reason in the emotive personality of humans!

VI

We harbour many such unresponding marbles within our own souls because we just entertain too much vanity in our rationality, and also because we do not have enough faith to believe that with our love, we can make even marble speak, as was the case with the saint Ramakrishna of Dakshineshwar.

Love, to be sincere and effective, has to leave reason aside. No one loves with clothes on. In the case of the love of man, the clothes, the hindering covers, are his ego, pride, self-eulogy and vain assumption of his sitting at the helm of his own destiny. Love sheds fear and ego. Love admits of no cover. Love is, like faith, an open window whisking man out of the present to the wide wide expanse in the heavens beyond. Love compels the soul to wake, bend, and accept. Love compels belief and compromise, sacrifice and surrender.

In the modern world of rationality, which we claim without ever knowing whether we are equipped with the necessary education and training to analyse and claim reason for correct functioning, very few have the mind and training to function as a reasonable individual. So circumstanced are we by our environs and associations, so conditioned by the social habits and forms, so choked and jammed by the variety of ever emerging new conditions, that the very idea of total surrender appears to us as an anathema to our existence as human beings. Vanity, that arch enemy of total surrender, hurts in the deep recesses of ego.

Yet we vaunt over our rationality when we have actually lost our power of discrimination. In fact, we are really slaves of our circumstances. Why then must we claim that we are rational beings?

Reason cannot fulfil all our demands, answer all our questions, guide us out of the labyrinth of modern life. Reason has failed. The Gita says, "*Karya-kaarana kartritve Prakritih hetu-ruchyate*: the control of the relationship of cause and effect, action and consequences is inherent in nature or *prakriti*." Rationality is a natural gift realized by higher forms of intellect. It is present even in the lower grades. Humans, considered on this plane, are considered the highest of the animal grades.

Yet it is true that very few of us are equipped with the faculty of choosing for ourselves. The various demands of society and family, the various commitments, the various problems bedevil our day-to-day existence, and deprive us of that freedom by which we can select, choose and act. Reason is a stern God, and admits of no compromise. Life is an open field beset with compromise at every step.

Hence, some kind of guidance, higher guidance from some higher power, from some higher dimension, from some remote control system is the only way for our redemption from the present miserable situation. We must learn to surrender, and call for a new and higher kind of help, a new and higher kind of assistance from another sphere, another dimension. That is the only escape through this baffling muddle. This justifies the religion of love and surrender, the ultimate religion of Bhakti.

VII

III. *Sadhana*

But how to achieve this? One has to practise it. But what is the way, the method, the mechanism of the approach? That depends on a certain given type of discipline which is known as *sadhana* or exercise. "*Saa paraanurakti reeshvare*", says sage Shandilya. Shandilya says that the love men attach to possessing things should be nursed in possessing God alone. In the famous Bhakti-treatise of the *Bhagavatam* Prahlada, the devotee begs of God to bestow him with that love which the materialists bear towards possessing the material objects and mundane glories: *Ya preetih avivekaanaam vishaye-shvanapaayini/Tvam anusmaratah sa mey hridayanmapa-sarpatu.*

No one loves after consulting aids of dictionary and grammar. No manual on love could bring a soul to the peak of ecstasy, which is attained only by such inner qualities as longing, questing, sensing with all hearts, embracing, gifting, sacrificing and surrendering. In the presence of the beloved, time passes swiftly on wings, and satiation is never reached. In his (her) absence, a keen sense of separation renders the soul to a state of complete disinterestedness in the surroundings, or in the consequences.

These are not gradual steps. These come out as natural effusions from within the being, all at once, in a bundle as it were, or all at once in a surge, like an avalanche. A spirit of true love feels love in everything, and admits of no other sentiment but of love. Hate or resentment cannot coexist with love of true nature. Even the most knowledgeable and most learned have been found to succumb totally under an overwhelming gripping devotion to love. The example of Shree Krishna Chaitanya Mahaprabhu of Nadia (West Bengal), the greatest learned man of his times, stands as a shining example of this longing for the love divine. Sant Jananeshwar, Meera Bai, Ramakrishna Paramahamsa stand as glorious examples of this state of mind.

Once when Shree Chaitanya had approached a pair of murderous notorious bandits, and implored them to love God with all intensity, he was hit hard by the churlish brutes on his head, and he fell down bleeding. Even as he was lying on the dust, soaked by his own blood, he extended his arms towards the bandits, and implored them not to mind the wound and the blood, but to try to bring him peace by singing the love of the Lord and thus relieve him from the pain caused.

In Chaitanya's vision, an object of love must be loved by all. That was his mission of life. He could not bear a world where even a single soul was deprived of the love for the supreme Divine. "Love the Lord, love the Lord, love the

Lord", he cried and cried as he ran through the market-place. The innocence and grip of his intense love for the Lord melted the hard heats, the non-conformists, the inimical forces, and in due course of time, all of them turned into spiritual devotees.

In love, the world cannot be seen divided. In love, the whole world must come into one. Love binds. It never resents or divides. The vanity of knowledge and love are sour neighbours. The two cannot make it together. Hitler was no fool. His knowledge of things was enviable, but he lacked love. Whatever he tried to achieve was built on hatred and intolerance. The seeds of his failure were germinating within the hatred for his neighbours. His patriotic zeal could not help him gain what he wanted to achieve because he lacked in the faith of man and the strength of love. Splendid failures of history have evolved out of lack of reliance on love, and vain confidence in soul-less personal glory.

Similarly, the glory of knowledge diminishes before the light of love. Examples of Shankaracharya, Shree Chaitanya, Vysadeva himself are there to show for all times that knowledge, howsoever great and immense in itself, cannot satisfy the hunger of the soul. Knowledge and ego are almost coterminal neighbours. Ego and submission are natural antitheses. No self-conscious individual could give his all, totally, when his subconscious suffers from blocked ego.

Once the erudite sage Vyasa watched his son Shuka (who always moved naked) pass along the bank of a river where a number of ladies were busy bathing at ease. As Shuka came by, the ladies just looked at the brilliant and soothing mass of Shuka's sweetly naked innocence, and continued undisturbed with their ablutions. But when Vyasa attempted to pass by them, they obviously panicked and ran for cover.

Confused, Vyasa asked the ladies the reason for the difference in their behaviour. They replied frankly that the intense love for the Lord had so much filled the sense of the sage Shuka that there was no room in his heart for any other base sentiments as lust and libido.

Vyasa, the sage, and father of Shuka, the Self-Realized, on the other hand, found all the glories of a learned man, but to be accepted as a realized soul, he had to fill his heart with love alone. Knowledge by itself can be an effective instrument, but knowledge cannot consummate. That can be attained only by intense love which can sacrifice the last trace of ego for the attainment of true and complete Union.

VIII

Love is thus the easiest way, but love is also a very demanding way. This demand is *sadhana*. And this kind of a soul to soul relationship, which transcends any emotionality in the relationship, as natural as the milk from the breast of the mother, is but the surest way to achieving the blessings of God. That means that the lucky person is assured of a life of bliss, *anandam*.

The best example of this kind of uninhibited, all-compliant total submission in ethereal love and love alone, is provided by the legendary milkmaids of Brindavan. Unlettered, unrecognized, rural and backward, plebeian and poor, these milkmaids achieved supreme Elysian bliss of total dedication as has been sung in the great Bhakti treatises: *Geetagovindam, Bhagavatam, Ujjala-Neelamani,* etc. The simple Gopis, due to their love for the Lord alone, attained total liberation, although they had no prior training of any kind of ascetic knowledge or *jnana*.

But love is an attachment of sorts. Love is a *raga*, and as such is, or could be, a trap for the action-reaction cycles of eternal transmigrations. It would be the very opposite of liberation, for love is an attachment as noted before. The danger is indeed real. But the sages have made a distinction between *raga* and *anuraga*, the latter being described as the purest of loving attachments dedicated only to the divine presence and to no one else. Cultivation of *anuraga* is the aim of the religion of love.

Then the two, the seeker and the sought, the lover and the beloved, form a unit. Duality evaporates. Merged in a divine thrill, absolute peace and tranquillity overwhelms all senses. When the soul experiences that ecstatic thrill of love, the personal identity of the lucky love ceases to respond to all the other senses. The outer world ceases to exist. Senses stand still, and merged in an Elysian stream of delight, the blessed one enjoys the bliss of *samadhi*.

Bhidyate hridaya granthih/Chhindante sarva samsayah
Ksheeyante sarva karmani/Tasmin driste paravare.

It is indeed a state of absolute silence and total stillness. It is the apex of this pursuit, and is termed as the 'para' state of *bhakti*, or divine love. All other types of love, howsoever cleverly demonstrated, are but the secondary types or *gauni bhakti*, qualitative love rather than *para*, or the love supreme.

Para bhakti, or supreme love, has been extolled in the Upanishads also. Svetaasvatara has this to say in conclusion of his Upanishad regarding *para bhakti* or supreme love:

Yasya deve para bhaktih/yathaa deve tathaa gurau
Tasyai te kathitaa hyarthaa/prakaashante mahaatmanah

That is, "Those who bear intense love towards the Lord, and the teacher who directs the mind to that love, receive the light from beyond for it is for them these verses have been written."

Para bhakti, or the supreme form of divine love, can be expressed in various ways: to remember the beloved God, moment by moment, to listen to the recitations of his glories, to praise him and sing of him, to worship his memory, image or even to mimic his qualities, to imitate him, to be able to serve him, to befriend him and embrace him, even finally to get merged in him are the natural expressions of one who is totally identified with an object of love. Total submission can include a total expiation of all the guilts of which none can remain unknown to the beloved. No shutters, no curtains, no suspicions, no sudden revelations can obstruct the quiet, calm, steady flow of the light of love. The two become one in such love.

This way of love may be found to be too difficult for persons of complex nature, but to be able to receive the divine grace, one has to wash away all complexities. Between the two lovers, there can be no cover. Whereas it is easier to throw away any material cover in love (even in non-love or pseudo-love), it is extremely difficult for persons to throw away the various covers of the grumbling morbid mind. The most annoyingly sticky and persistent cover, and the most obstinate one is ego, self-esteem, vanity of vanities.

Liberation is attained by those souls whose love for the divine grace renders them totally merged in the sea of love, where to love is to surrender, to love is to prostrate, to love is to sacrifice, to love is to stand naked before the light of all lights.

Love is a religion by itself. To follow its discipline is the noblest and sublimest *sadhana*, or yogic undertaking. The practice of love calls for both a rigorous plan and extreme restraint.

Such total love, an experience of total love alone, paves the way to liberation or *mukti*, which is the fourth category in which Shandilya has classified the steps of liberation through the religion of love.

IV. *Mukti* (Liberation)

All who have had the experience know that knowledge alone cannot give the pleasure of the thrill of success which comes through direct contact and devotedness to the object. Without devotion, sheer knowledge is like handling a coconut as a fruit without knowing that the real fruit has to be obtained after husking the nut and cracking the shell.

This situation answers for the attempt to experience liberation without first having the devotional determination and concentration in obtaining the blissful experience of union with the Supreme. This kind of liberation, the merging of all titles, all distinguishing features, every iota of identity into the One-ness of the *para-sambit*, or supreme consciousness, cannot be obtained without total submission and wilful merging of the idea of two-ness into the One and only One.

First merges the *upadhi*, or the marks of distinction. Then merges ego. Then goes the *buddhi* (personal understanding). Lastly, the personal *antahkarana*, unfeatured consciousness, or internal *chetanaa*, gets submerged into the cosmic consciousness. All duality disappears. Only the bliss of union reigns supreme. Liberation is obtained, and the feeling of bliss alone remains as an effulgent glow that brightens up all the subsidiaries: *Tadeva vaasaa anubhaati sarvam*.

This kind of total transformation (transfiguration) is entirely subjective, and it rarely takes place as long as the body exists. When this does happen, and a human being is transfigured into the supreme bliss, he is known as *jeevanmukta*. He becomes a Buddha, a Christ, a Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. This is a *muktapurusha*. That is the one beloved of the Gods.

Do not look for the sun in a hall of many mirrors. If you have to see the sun, come out of the mirrored hall. Stand in the open and look up. The sun is there, has always been there waiting on you. All you have to do is to break through the prison house of many mirrors, and get free to be face to face with the real sun.

Total love in total submission does it.

4

AATMAA TVAM GIRIJA MATIIH SAHACHARAAH
PRAANAAH SHAREERA GRIHAM
POOJA TE VISHAYOPA-BHOGA RACHANAA
NIDRAA SAMAADHI STHITIH
SANCHAARAM PADAYOH PRADAKSHINA VIDHIH
MANTRAANI SARVAA GIRAH
YAD YAD KARMA KAROMI TAD TAD AKHILAM
SHAMBHO TVAD AARAADHANAM.

—ANON

I worship Thee and Thee alone O Shambhu, even as I keep myself busy in my daily life. It is Thou who art my soul. My mind is Thy consort, the Daughter of the Mountains, my breath Thy attendants. My body is Thy temple, all my sensuous joys are but joys dedicated to Thee. When I sleep, I go into Samadhi as when I go about my daily chores, I go circumambulating around your abode. Words I speak are but prayers to Thee. (In this way) whatever I do, howsoever I am engaged, all my actions are dedicated to Thee.

Chapter Four

THE SHANDILYA SUTRA

The Supreme is there. Spirit or form, law or feeling, it is there. It is only imprisoned within the body of the living individual (*jiva*). To taste the Supreme, that prison house has to be destroyed. Gita in the 14th chapter speaks clearly of this in the 6th, 7th and 8th verses. Gita also declares, "And he who transcends the three *gunas* through his intense love for me is transformed into the Brahman", and the Gita is an authority as unfailing as the Vedas. [Incidentally, Gita warns against Gauri Bhakti as different from the Para Bhakti.]

Enquiries about the principles of Bhakti start with the statement that Bhakti is the highest love for God. The nature of this love has been described by Prahlaada in the Bhagavatam when he says, "God, grant me that constancy in you, which the property seekers seek in amassing their wealth." (SS: 1-2)

What man seeks in imagining the gift of immortality, that is, freedom from fear of death, is removed by the intense love for God, that love which removes all hate as well as greed for all other objects. Hate as a sentiment is not abiding compared to the eternity of the power of love in God. Gita says, "Those who love the gods take their ways, but those who love Me abide in Me." (Gita: 7:23)

Total love admits of no contrary sentiments. Love is total. God is total. *Raga* and *rasa* mean the same thing, one is the cause, the other is an effect of *raga*. The inner consummation of the feeling of love, the tasting of the feeling of love, i.e. the *rasa* of love bestows tolerance and makes a gift of the divine courage to forgive. He who loves cannot hate. Actually *rasa* and *raga* mean the same, both being derived from the same verb root. (SS: 3-6)

Love for God does not depend on any effort. It bursts in blooms and bears a pleasant fragrance which bids no man's personal efforts. The ways of love are sunk in mystery, and since the roots are mysterious, the ways of love and their functionings are also shrouded in mystery. Far reaching could be its effects.

"*Bahoonaam jamanaam ante jnanvaan maam prapadyate/Vasudevah sarvamiti sa mahatma sudurlabhah*," says the Gita: 7:19. The idea that one would fully study, sort out, conclude and then start loving, after studying fully the map of the journey, is very obtuse to the ways of true love which follows an intuitional process. Love grows because it is there. It is there because there is a call for it. Why this call? The answer is clouded in piles of mystery, unfathomable mystery. In order to be deprived of love, in order to abandon love, one has to kill love but Love is immortal. Like a peepal or banyan tree, it suddenly springs out from apparent death and suprises even a wasteland. No life can exist completely devoid of love. Even a murderer, a hangman loves his child.

Apara Bhakti or *Para-Bhakti*, supreme love, is a direct gift from God. Love is God's grace. In love God and His grace become one. With this grace showered, mortal fear of death and thereby of separation from the Beloved, completely disappears because in the realm of God, separation is unthinkable. (SS: 7-9)

People in pursuit of the divine grace and liberation often speak of following the yoga system of Patanjali, or of the Vedanta system of Baadaraayana, and follow those arduous courses. They must know that the easiest and the most infallible course of attaining to beatitude is dedication and surrender in complete love, love effused through grace and culminating in grace.

Success through yoga or *jnana* ultimately depends on a faithful pursuit, a rigid kind of dedication (*prapatti*), a kind of *sharanaagati*. Then why the roundabout way? Why not the Bhakti way directly? Why not the simple minded way of the Vrindaavana-milkmaids, who had no knowledge of the obtuse systems like the yoga or the Vedanta? (SS: 10-14)

Gita clearly says (18:55) that through love the soul not only 'knows' (*jaanaati*) but acquires a super-knowledge, i.e. the knowledge that is obtainable through intuition, super-senses (*abhi-jaanaati*), "...and having known Me thus, then becomes One with Me."

Becoming one with 'Me' implies that becoming one with the supreme Brahman, as different from becoming one with a single or many devas or deities. Devas like Indra, Brahmaa, Naasatya, Ashvins, who had been worshipped as powerful divinities, gradually gave way to other gods, until they were forgotten. Love for those individual names or for their spiritual identities are but time-bound, limited in scope. Bhakti to them is not of that supreme category as love in the ultimate source of *Aanandam* represented by *Brindaavana-biharee Govinda Hari*.

The deva mentioned in the verses already quoted (*Yasya Deve paraa Bhakti*, etc.) means gods in general and not the supreme source of all bliss, all *aanandam*. Love for that ultimate alone could expatiate all kinds of transgressions and successfully unite the individual *jeeva* with the Cosmic One (*Sat-Chit)*.

'Experiencing' the Godhead, as prescribed by the yoga system, is not the same as to be united to God which is identifying with the Cosmic Self. *Jnana* or knowledge of the true nature of God could be acquired through meditation as prescribed in the yoga system, and through following concentration, but the consummation of the bliss of total union as experienced in Bhakti is unique. Yet this is also to be noted that an experience of love too expects total concentration on one and the only one Love. This has been regarded as a *gauna*, or secondary form of devotion, although this too could be claimed as Bhakti. It is Bhakti of the secondary order. (SS: 15-20) (For *Gauna Bhakti* see Narada Bhakti Sutra before).

Patanjali in his *Yoga Sutra* condemns love as a form of 'attachment.' In *Yoga Sutra* 3 of the Second Chapter he says that any kind of attachment is the cause of *klesha* or suffering (*Raga-dveshaabhiniveshaah Kleshah*). A deeper understanding of the yoga aphorism would reveal the truth that the word 'attachment' mentioned in the *sutra* actually means attachment of the mundane sort and not of the transcendental experience. Gita says that the spiritual alone devotedly worship. (*Yajante saattvikaah devaan*—XVII:4). In this context it is rewarding to remember the lines:

Tapasvibhyadhiko yogi/jnaanibhyopi matodhikah
Karmibhya-s-chaadhiko yogih/Tasmaat yogi bhavaarjuna.
Yoginaamapi sarveshaam/Matgate-naanta-r-aatmanaa
Shraddhaavaan bhajate yo maam/sa me yuktatamo-matah (VI:46-47).

The lines are clear and final. "One who follows the path of Yoga is superior to the ascetics. They are superior to the Vedantins also. They are superior to the Karmayogis also. Therefore be a follower of Yoga. But remember that of all the types of these yogis, those who have absolute faith in Me, and those who love Me intensely are regarded by Me as the most advanced of all."

Those who are devoted to the reading of the Gita are aware of the greatest of all declarations on love in the 12th chapter, which has appeared as an answer to certain questions by Arjuna on the confusing subject of selection of the superior way between the emotional approach of love and that of the more austere wisdom.

There the Lord, in an unambiguous language, asserts as only a beloved would answer a lover. "Those who with their minds fixed on Me, harmoniously adore Me with supreme faith, are, in my view, engaged in the best form of Yoga. Yet those, on the other hand, who worship Me in my unmanifested, omnipresent, indestructible, ineffable, inconceivable, unchanging eternal immutability, and restraining and subduing their senses, are able to treat all with an eye of equality, also do finally achieve Me."

"But there is a difference. Those whose minds are concentrated in my inscrutable and ineffable concept find the going very hard. Those yogis, limited by the restrictions of their bodies and their demands, undergo great sufferings in fixing their minds. But those who offer Me their humble worship, totally surrendering the fruits of all their actions to me, totally offering their own selves to me along with their efforts and their results too, yes, I do save them. I am their Redeemer, their Salvation. I save them from this ocean of cyclic deaths and births because they have surrendered their souls to Me." (Gita: XII:2-7)

Shandilya differentiates faith (*shraddhaa*) from love (*bhakti*), of which he considers *bhakti* as an achievement and *shraddha* as a condition of that achievement. Faith makes room for love. No love could be rooted without the maturing of *shraddha* or faith. (SS: 20-26)

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In attaining this stage of love, mere wishes alone would not be enough. Before the heart gets well balanced, firm and steady, pure and shining so as to deserve the awakening of pure love, tender, delicate, unaffected and total, the role of steady efforts cannot be ignored. Efforts are necessary for results. For the paddy to yield rice, a good thrashing and pounding is a must. Until the rice gets clear of the cover of the husk, steady and skilful pounding is not only required but such efforts are regarded as an essential commitment to achieving the results of total love.

To this extent efforts (yoga) are commendable and necessary; even unavoidable. Animals would not enter by themselves in the mouth of a sleeping lion. Effort is of the essence.

Preparation, preparation and again preparation. Dhruva had to prepare. Prahlaada had to do the same. Even the Gopis had to get over their carnal grades and consider their actions and bodies as the playing grounds of the Lord without having the least selfish sense of personal gratification of sheer carnality. John the Baptist, St. Cecil, St. Teresa, St. John on the Cross, St. Augustine, all of them knew the benefits of a total surrender in love.

Such dedication in *preeti* (*anuraaga*) must be *aatmaika parayanaa*. That is to say, "The beloved must be accepted as Atman itself." "*Aatman iti tu avagachhanti grahyaanti cha*," says the Brahmasutra. Considering the Self as the Atman, and then realizing that very Atman in the beloved binds the two into one, and in this way the sublimity of Advaita in love is attained although the two bodies seem to be separately contained. [In the Tantra way too this point is the aim so that Ma and I become an unidentifiable singleness.]

It appears to be true that the love that binds the two as one identity, that could provoke realizations like 'I am He' or 'I am the Brahman' or 'I am you and you are I', is also subject to *maya* (pronounced maayaa), which is an inseparable concomitant of the creation. If all is *maya* then what is the Brahman? Is my love also enmeshed within the confusion of maya? Is love illusive? Ephemeral? Visionary? Unsubstantial?

The presence of maya in the creation phenomenon is to be accepted as a chair is accepted in a house. When asked "Is your father home?", the sensible reply would be "Yes, he is" and not "No please. He is in his chair" which would be foolishly accurate. To say He is at home would automatically mean that he is sitting somewhere in the house, which detail need not be emphasized. In all our daily transactions with matters outside of the self, the factor of *maya* is automatically taken for granted, as the outside of a coat includes automatically its colour or pattern or design, which are not the coat itself.

In a similar manner when the Brahman and the Love for the Brahman is indicated, specially with reference to an object like an object of love, the presence of *maya* is of course indicated. In such references, as in the lover and the beloved, no 'third' is imagined, suggested, or accepted. (SS: 212-40)

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Gita says that matter and soul are unchangeable eternal factors and cannot be separated (XIII:19). *Maya* and *prakriti* are one and the same (Shvet. Up. IV:10). Whenever and wherever *prakriti* spreads her charms, the very charms spread *maya* around. It would be wrong to say that the two operate in conjunction as one. Indeed the two *are* one. My love is the object of my love. In the person I love I see and realize my love. This is due to the *prakriti* within me. Call it *maya* if you will but this is my *prakriti*. *Prakriti* induces me, and I act in order to fulfil my *prakriti*, my destiny, my end and purpose of life.

When I love, I love, and would not be dissuaded from that bliss by the sudden cry "*Maya*!!!" which I know is just another name for my *prakriti* which displays the *gunas*, which are my nautral constituents. I am a part of the *maya*, a shareholder as it were of her skills which function through the *gunas* which I inherit from my past chains of *karmas*. I am what I am for what I have made myself to be.

Only my actions, my behaviour, my moods could tell if my love is just an illusory visionary chimera, or is it a total sacrifice and surrender, an act of *fana*, as the Persian Sufi would say.

Down the line of the Bhakti tradition we find examples of such complete and loving surrender through a variety of behaviour of the great souls who had staked all their spiritual self for the love of the divine. That love had taken many forms, many aspects, many expressions but in spite of the changes in the ways and modes of expressions, in essence and in truth, the various expressions led to the one essential truth that they loved. That was important. That gave them the title to be considered as saints, examples of real sainthood, examples of the Self-realized.

Arjuna had demonstrated his love for the Lord by the extremely reverential attitude he bore to Krishna even though the two were intimate friends. In the same way Vidura showed his love through the manifestation of his natural piety and delight. The milkmaids showed their love by the pangs they bore at Kirshna's separation. Hanuman showed his by promising to stay by Rama as long as the people would sing of Rama's greatness. He never looked forward to spread his own reknown. Or the love and adoration, the faith and constancy of Prahlaada whose Love and Faith would not wilt even under severe pressures and threats. Or of Bheeshma Pitamaha who was ready to offer his life gladly to the charging Krishna in the Great Battlefield. Each one expressed his or her attachment and submission to the greatness of the individual they loved in their different ways but their love was the same nonetheless.

In love or even in enmity the constancy one bears towards the name of God, in fun, in derision, or in fervent desire, the urge of the heart to figure the name and actions of another person releases in him special energy which go to mould his character, ensure his happiness, his ultimate peace of mind. It is the unfailing constancy that counts. The undivided attention moulds the nerves to be able to reach a condition of intense eagerness which helps to concentrate the mind. And a concentrated mind could in no time learn to exchange the disturbing negativeness to the peaceful positiveness of love. Strong hatred is an aberration of the sentiment of love. (SS: 40-55)

Bhakti and *bhajana* are the two words Gita uses again and again in different context but always to mean love and adoration. It appears that in the Gita, Vyasa was keen on emphasizing how dearly he prized the contribution of pure love towards realization of samadhi or the final bliss.

(i) *Bhajantyananyamanaso jnatva bhutaadim avyayam* (IX:13)
(ii) *Satatam Keertayanto maam Yatantas cha drirdha-vrataah*
Namasysanta-s-cha mam bhaktyaa nitya-yuktaa upaasate (I:29)
(iii) *Eka-Bhakti-r-vishishyate* (VII:17)
(iv) *Mad-bhaktaa yaanti maamapi* (VII:23)
(v) *Mayi te teshu-chaa-pyaham* (IX:29)

In the Ninth chapter of the Gita, the liberalism of love, the wide receptivity of love, has been repeatedly and unequivocally emphasized. It has been emphasized that in the field of love and loving, in the field of dedication and surrendering, in the case of identification and union, no discrimination is tolerated.

The Brahmanical scriptures, by their self-styled rigid regulations, attempt to deprive many classes of men from their ritualistic exercises by creating artificial bars between persons and persons, between one set of God's creatures and another set. But in the path of love, in the path of Bhakti, no bars are tolerated. All bars have been lifted. Love, lovers, and the loving register their simultaneous presence through just one identification, and that is love. If one loves, one has obtained the passport to the nearness of God. Perfect Love is perfect samadhi, perfect bliss.

Shandilya considers that with the passing of the three different *yugas* the way of realizing perfect bliss has changed also. This is, he thinks, due to the difference in the nature of the people of the times. With the passage of time, society changes and so do men. In the Krita or Satya Yuga, meditation alone would have sufficed because the people of those times knew how to control the mind. They practised concentration by keeping the mind in a state of blank innocence. This was not so in the middle yugas, Treta and Dwapara, when *archa* or elaborate worship, as a substitute of pure concentration and meditation, was practised through a lot of preparation and showmanship.

But in the present age of Kaali, sages thought reciting only the name of God, as Hari or Krishna or Rama was sufficient for the final success, i.e. attaining bliss, immaculate *aanandam*. Men often offer oblations to God with the things that they themselves consider dear to them. Sharing objects of daily use, singing and praising of the beloved, keeping always in mind the detailed requirements of the beloved, and keeping the mind always ready to provide for all the things the beloved would need, are specified and recommended as parts of the process that leads to the experience of blissful *aanandam*.

Nrisingha Puratapani, a Bhakti treatise of high merit, suggests that "The sacred waters of Ganga, Prayaga, Gaya, Pushkara, Naimisha, Kurujangala or Yamuna purifies for a while, but the water the Beloved's feet have touched purifies the tainted soul for ever and ever" (59:46). Great emphasis has been laid in the conduct of worship, on its forms and orders. Any transgression is severely warned against. Thus even in *puja* or *archa*, Brahmanism has interfered..

In fact, the best approach, however, is the approach of love. Love purifies, love condones, love embraces, love fulfils. Love was the first of ecstasies and love is the last of fulfilment, complete fulfilment.

In the Gita, Sri Krishna Vaasudeva says, "Love alone knows me perfectly, realizes me totally." (*Bhaktya maam abhijaanaati*). Gita says further "...that a much simpler fare (even though non-Vedic), which is within the reach of the poorest of the poor, which even the basic societies could organise for pleasing me, even if not sanctioned, even though not recommended by conventions, pleases me much more than all the stuff prescribed by the Vedas."

Even a flower, a leaf, a drop of water would do, only if the gift is made with total love. Love is of the essence. *Patram pushpam phalam toyam yo mey bhaktya prayacchati/Tad aham Bhakt-yupa-rhitam ashnaami prayataatmanah* (IX:26).

It appears that the lines are specially meant for putting the lover-worshiper and the beloved God free of all Brahmanical restrictions or interferences. The religion of love, as described in the Gita, liberates the seeker from the shackles of both Brahmanical forms and their elaborate and confusing details.

Love liberates, and Gita extols that liberation. Gita appears to enshrine the faith that love purifies all prescribed ritualistic forms and details. Pure love rejects cumbersome varieties of forms, and admits the soul directly into the recesses of the *sanctum sanctorum* of the heart of the object of love. Bliss is his who loves. And love is never hindered by forms, details and book-knowledge.

In conclusion of the valuable fourth chapter of the Gita, Sri Krishna has this to say, "The yogis (aspirants who are gifted with constant unswerving meditative power) are far superior to the ascetics (who follow the austere path of self-chastisement). They are even superior to the men of knowledge, or men engaged in ritualistic yajnas. Therefore, oh Arjuna, be a yogi (a person with constant love in me)."

"But of the yogis, too, those are of the highest category who love me intently, deeply with all their hearts. These last are the greatest of the yogis. These are totally dedicated to me by the constancy of their zeal."

"They love to hear of Me, sing of Me; to fill their memory with only my thoughts; to prostrate and hold my feet to their breast; to adore me with all kinds of offerings and decorations; to bow down to me; even as it were they were my personal servants. They become my best friends, and finally they give themselves up to my Grace."

Shrvanam keertanam Vishnoh smaranam paada-sevanam
Archanam vandanam daasyam saukhyam aatma-nivedanam

(Bhagavatam VII: v:22-23)

In the 74th aphorism Shandilya finally says that one need not be too punctilious regarding the forms and etiquettes relating to the details of worship. He reminds of the famed direction in the Shruti, "If in the course of performance of a rite, one slips through ignorance or mistake from the given formal directions, one need not mind. One should only recall the name of Vishnu, the Beloved, and all slips would be rectified."

Ajnaanaat yadi va mohaat prachyavet aadhvareshu yad
Smaranaat eva tad vishnoh sampoornam syad-iti shrutih.

(This verse reminds us of an injunction in the Atharva Veda: *Vishno kavyam rakshaswa.* (Oh Vishnu, protect my prayers.))

In favour of the effectivenss of the recitation of the name of the beloved God, Shruti, or the traditional records have this to say:

> *Noonaatiriktataam jaataa kalau vedokta karmanaa*
> *Saangam bhavatu tat sarvam Shree Hare-r-naama*
> *keertanaat.*

In the Kali age performance of all Vedic rites have been rendered superfluous. It is no longer necessary to perform them. Let all those rites take a back seat in this age. Only singing the name of Hari successfully substitutes all Vedic pursuits. Love alone expiates all. When love is the power behind, forms do not count. Spirit is all in all.

The basic sources of spiritual knowledge in the Vedic culture were closed to a large section of the community. Spiritual knowledge, which was not formally available to women in general and to the lower castes, was easily available to all under the Bhakti system, which as a religion covered more people than the entire higher community.

In fact, under the influence of the Buddha, no one was denied the satisfaction of striving for spiritual joy. Compassion and love formed the two pillars of this kind of general spiritual emancipation. In the *Mokshadharma* episode of the *Shanti Parvam* of the Mahabharata, this new angle in the spiritual training of the people has been described as *Ekata Dharma*. In fact, it was the *dharma* of love which recommended the Vasudeva adoration under the technical exercise of the *Chatutbyuha,* i.e. the worship of the four stalwarts: Krishna Vaasudeva, Sankarshana Baladeva, Pradyumna and Aniruddha. This *dharma* took care only of the life here, but it promised redemption of, and care for, the departed souls. God's Grace never forsook the lover of God. (Gita: VIII-16)

—(SS: 56-84)

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Shandilya has been very explicit in his treatment of the basis of the religion of Bhakti. He has not unnecessarily been critical of the Vedas, neither of the Vedic society. Yet he has tried his best to establish a new form of religion which appeals to all, which includes all, which opens up the world and what lies beyond the cognisable world to the ardent pursuit of sincere devotion, even in spite of the erudition of the Vedas, or the complexities of the Brahmanical yajnas.

In doing this, Shandilya has diligently argued, keeping in mind the pros and cons of the various possible objections that the conventionals might raise. He is not easygoing like Narada who is all love and acceptance, broad and liberal to the extreme, and sweet and charming to all. He does not provoke. Neither is he anxious to argue nor to debate. His is a simple and straight way of love.

This is not so in Shandilya, who argues, quotes, pleads, imagines opposition and then settles it. Narada is all emotion and simplicity. Shandilya is like an expert lawyer holding a brief.

Love is. It is to be felt. It is to be shared and disseminated. When love is realized, it creates such a fervent urge in the soul that overfilled with it, it wants to rush out and spread the good news amongst those who are in need of it. It bears its own message. It carries its own banner.

In the divine love that emancipates the suffering soul by seeing it merge into the glories of the fountain of love, there is, and should be, some substance, something tangible, something wholesome, some spirit that is abiding and binding. Famished man seeks this. What is after all this love? How do we define it? Is there a definition? Yes, there is. We call this blissful feeling God. We are not concerned, indeed we need not be sure if there is a God. What we definitely know is that there is this heavenly substance and spirit of love. That love alone is God. If love is not God, there is no God.

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Is then God a feeling only? If not feeling, then of what use would be a God about which we have no feeling at all if not one of awe and awe alone? All love is feeling, all relationship is feeling. Our world is full of feelings. All the things, objects, incidents, actions, reactions of which life is made are nothing but what we create within our feeling. Feeling alone is our connection. Feeling alone is our relation. In feeling the world, I subsist. I and the feeling in me constitute the two poles around which my universe spins. Without feeling, I would not be I.

Love is a feeling, a sublime and transcendental, a unique and indescribable feeling. So is God. If one feels God, God is there. If one does not feel it, he is free to do so, and God is not for him. God is my innermost, personal, secret and confidential feeling. I feel Him to feel that I am His and He is mine. I depend on Him, I confide in Him. He is my end, purpose, lord, master, witness, resort, support, and the greatest well-wisher, my destiny. That I use the capital letter while referring to Him is because He is the only one for me. He is the capital of my capitals. In Him I reside, in Him I abide, in Him I feel my final end from where I step into eternity. Space could mean nothing for me for He is all-space. Time fails to swallow me, terrorise me, because when I am in Him, I am in time.

But so intimate a feeling also looks so far. What is so obvious is also so remote. What is so very living and alert is also so very material and opaque. He speaks and speaks not, sees and sees not, hears and hears not, moves and moves not. He is the composite of all kinds of feelings and sensations. He does not suffer any name, abode, distinctive features, any tangibility whatsoever. He is intently mine and mine alone. He is because I feel Him. He would not be if I were not to feel Him. In love, He and I are indistinguishable, inseparable as wind and motion, fire and heat, flame and light.

In love and in distress, I want to call Him because He is intimately mine and mine alone. But how could I call Him who is *nirmala, nirupadhika, nitya-sattvastha* (no stain, no character, eternally merged in His own Goodness)? So I have to divine a name for Him. Naming Him has been forced on me for my own convenience, for my assistance. He is my help, my abode, my final and infallible 999!!

A name helps to establish a relationship. In geometry, while proving a theory we have to name the lines and points. These are not names but assistance to comprehend the abstract. God is abstract and subjective. In God we have to realize and fraternize with the incomprehensible.

My love too, like God, is abstract and subjective. To have given a name to the feeling which I treasure within me assists me rather more easily to deal with what I love. That is the reason why we name the unknown persons taking birth from us, and who later become the objects of our greatest love.

The love of the divine presence is much dearer, and much more adoring. So it is indeed a pleasure to name the object of my love. So I love to name Him (or It) as Rama, Krishna, Kaali, Shiva, Ganesh, Durga, etc.

To name is not to limit but to distinguish. To name is not to describe but to inscribe. Names are many, could be many, but the subject is One and only One. It becomes easier to deal with what I love in the social amphitheatre as the architect, the sculptor, the mathematician. Scientists blaze and index points and lines, situations and gradients in order to facilitate the understanding, and to expedite the actual work in hand.

Astronomers name stars, cartographers name rivers, mountains, seas, lakes, even mark out and position the vast illimitable skies. Name holds, name fixes, name concentrates, determines, makes the far near and the distant familiar. Names have purposes to serve. Names are essential. Names help men to reach the identity of the divine in harmony with the individual's divination of the divine.

To name God is not a convenience but a necessity, not a technique but an expression of the soul. Just as to name my child, who appeared without a name, has been an expression of my soul. I choose the most elevating and endearing name for him, so that when I call him, a harmonious response rings within me. I am, and the society is, proud of an elevating name. A condemned name condemns the future of the child forever. A name is an expression of my will, even the will that has been sleeping within.

A name is a hope, a delight, a leading light into the dark future. Name brings my child nearer to me. The name I put to my God is my heart's response, my heart's throb, my dying moment's leading light.

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Yet some faithfuls could do without a name. And amongst them rose the fervent form of devoted prayers as the Sufis extolled. The warmth of their prayers reached India, the land of many Gods, many names. One Brahman broke into a symphony of songs and dances in the name of the un-named God, their Beloved.

When we give names to God, we limit Him. But mind you, we do not multiply Him. He is indeed limitless. We define and describe Him but He is beyond descriptive words. Sage Vyasa, one of Hindu society's greatest Advaita Brahma Vaadins, the promulgator of the Monist Vedanta Darshana, had confessed that the naming of God is a human weakness. He says:

Roopam roopa vivarjitasya Bhavato dyaanena yat kalpitam
Stutyaadi-r-vachaneeyataa-khila-guro-r-doorikritaa yan-mayaa
Vyaapitvamcha niraakritam Bhagavato yat-teertha yaatraadinaa
Kshantavyam Jagadeesha tad-vikalataa dosha-tryam matkritam

[For translation, see Preface]

Yet the unnameable had to be named. Why? Let us hear from one of the most celebrated of the monists of old, the great Madhusoodana Saraswati. He laments in the following fervent stanza that in spite of the fact that the divine is beyond description, immaculate and conceptual, in spite of the fact that many of the saints have achieved beautification by only concentrating on His transcendental ineffable, supra-mundane, immanent, omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent nature, he himself finds it extremely rewarding to conceive of God as a little blue-tinted youth playing his flute along the banks on the Yamuna. (See Preface for the original Sanskrit.)

The great saint's predicament was very real. He is implying that it is far easier to practise meditation on a given defined object that stirs deep emotional responses within than to be concentrating on the unthinkable evanescent, immanent logos. The final feeling of samadhi is of the essence here, not the instrumental variants. The attainment of the full realization of the beautific feeling is what is essential, not the 'way' through which it is achieved. Having achieved the sublime feeling, thereafter all the theories melt into sheer stark nothingness.

The great example of Radha is before us. She was the dearest and the nearest of all the devotees in Brindavan. Yet when the time came, when Krishna had to leave Brindavan forever, and when all other Gopis (milkmaids) had been so moved by the separation, she, Radha, kept her calm and was not in the least disturbed. To her, the feeling of His being within her heart was all that mattered, not the name, not the form, not the historical identity or the geographical proximity. Love achieved, the object of love gains immortality by the very virtue of the immortality of love. Names thus do not matter once the spirit is achieved.

By the strength of the same argument, it may be said that names do matter until the goal is attained, until the Spirit is fully absorbed, until Anandam, that idealistic peak of *Sat-Chit-Aanandam* of the Real, the Conscious and the Blissful is attained. Till then a personalized divinity appears to grant many small favours that poor mortals seek, and without which the poor souls find the way too hard going.

One can continue bafflingly to deceive, and succeed in deceiving one's ego for ever and ever. It is like a cat trying to catch her own tail, going round and round.

But once the same one falls in love with a name, a form, an ideal, once the same one establishes, through his Guru/Murshid or through some Grand Kuttani (soliciting *tout* between lovers) who can act as an ethereal liaison between his personal soul and the cosmic soul, between his desire to love and his object of love, then the lucky one is certain to be emancipated through the bond he establishes between his poor famishing soul and the cosmic soul, Brahman. That would be achievement of the love of all loves, achievement of the nameless ecstasy through the named one.

The secret of naming the nameless, of identifying the indefinable was known to a large group of spiritual seekers in the Middle East who had inherited the banners of the forgotten followers of Zarathustra and Mithra, and who had been overwhelmed and wiped off by religious violence of unknown proportion. Zealots are specimens of oversanguine bundles of mishandled ego.

Violence could wipe away apparent forms of a culture, specially a quiet ancient culture. But no amount of violence could root out the basic urgency of faith. Faith bears the stamp of the soul, not of any external regimented fanatic compendium.

Ideas that can change the world cannot be destroyed themselves. Within the embers of a dying fire, the potentiality of a future conflagration survives, and so do the ideas. The buried ideas survived within fervent human hearts in and around the land washed by the bountiful Euphrates and the Tigris, in the cool valleys bordering the southern Caspian, and in the vernal celestial plateau of Samarkand and Bokhara, Amu Daria, Sir Daria and the quiet Aral Sea.

The liberal people here and about, already adopting the soothing poetic charms of Shiaism as a more liberal form of Islam, nursed the flame of love for God, and a new way of sublimation was evolved by what we now call the Sufis (the neat and clean ones). They were the poetically sensitive idealists who sang to praise, danced to shed all inhibitions which encumber the soul, and wrote great mystic poetry for perpetuity to record and remember.

We have already spoken of these great mystics of Persia. By the middle of the fourteenth century and before the mid-fifteenth, these Sufis and their poetical philosophy, especially the history of their martyrdom, had impressed many hearts, and their zealous love for God as a beloved (of the soul in love) had won for them a large number of learned and sensitive admirers.

From the times of Omar Khayyam and Jalaluddin Rumi to the times of Blake and Khalil Gibran, the traditions of Sufi poetry have been enriching the spiritual literature of all times. We have already referred to the great mystic poetry left by the Sufi heritage in Iraq, Syria, Persia, which had flooded the North-Western parts of India, where rose great admirers of Sufism, which many Vedantists in India found acceptable to their mode of thinking. Kabir, Dadu, Nanak and Tagore are examples.

A number of socio-political factors converged on the Indian society during this period which caused deep fissures in the social scene. Apart from the fact that the dreaded Huns had always been threatening beyond the borders, a new form of government was imposed by the Islamic conquerers on the hitherto honoured monarchical system of India mainly drawn out by the laws of Manu.

We have already referred to the Buddhistic revolution, and the following Tantric popular euphoria. In other words, the vast mass of people who had stood outside the tight cordon of Brahmanism, and who had been accorded some amount of equality through the Tantric and Buddhist participation, ran for some kind of cover before the ravages of the new enemy, the Islamic aggression, which threatened their homes, honour, faiths and property. The slogan 'Either Islam or death' unnerved a people nursed on logic and soul's call. The argument ran in the trite declaration, "To eliminate the non-Islamic is our first faith and last mission!" Such an astounding ferocious attitude shook an ancient peaceful society to its foundations.

Like a drowning man reaching his hand even for a straw, the panicked society began to build bridges over the perennial streams that had been feeding the spiritual hunger for generations of Indians. A host of spiritualists, mostly along the lines of the famed and honoured Sufi saints, sang of personified gods or mystic beloveds whom they wanted to hold on to with utmost sense of dedication and sacrifice. The ideation of '*Isque-Maa-shook* and *Aashique*' suggested to them the call of love for a God on the level of the humans. They craved through this emotional process for God's, the Atman's, response. This was not far from the Vaishnava cry, "*Tomaar A'mar ei virahero antarale, kato aar setu bandhi*?" (Separated thus eternally, how long must I depend on building bridges?—Tagore).

The Bawuls of Bengal were inspired by this kind of tripartite love established between Jeeva-Shiva and Bhakti or Prem (love). According to the sectarian convenience or spiritual acceptance, this 'Shiva' could be the divine mother of Tantra, or Bhagavaan Krishna Vaasudeva of Brindavan, or Raghupati Raghava Raja Rama of Ayodhya. The basis was offered, and the details were worked out according to the emotional draw of the local devotees.

The advent of Bhakti as a religion appeared as a counterfoil to the Islamic aggression, which indulged in forced conversions without convincing the victims about the spiritual superiority of the new faith. Forced conversions embittered the converts or their communities, and left the people unconvinced about the spiritual superiority of the new faith.

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Socially speaking, the greatness of Islam (at least theoretically) intended to accept and view all Islamic people as one category, but in practise it did not. Against the Indian background, and in spite of Buddhistic culture, even Islam had to moderate itself to the demands of the caste system! The Indian version of Islam practised caste distinctions, and regarded certain communes as exclusive.

The converts from the lower castes and the casteless, in spite of their conversions, remained on the same lower rungs of the social ladder. The converts from the Rajput clans were treated as higher in ranks than the converts from the tribals, the fifth castes or the casteless. To that extent, Islamic equality failed to convince the sensitive system of caste, and the converts itched for a way to come back to their familiar grounds and be acccepted as parts of the Hindu society.

Quite naturally, an imaginary but effective borderland was created wherein lived the new converts who kept hanging between their traditional friends and relatives and their new society which, for one reason or another, hesitated to accept them. They felt as foreigners in their own land, segregated within their own commune. An answer had to come. History does not keep hanging in a vacuum. History makes room, and moves on.

Some such liberal philosophy of religious pursuits had to evolve within India which could shelter these borderland spiritual vagrants into a cozy confident niche of theologically appealing and spiritually wholesome religion. This was to have been a religion where all would be welcome as equals, and all would finally be assured of some divine protection and refuge.

Thanks to the patrimony of Tantra and Buddhism, Indian society had already prepared a liberal background for this kind of fraternity.

Quite naturally, the answer was easy to evolve from within a land where Tantra had flourished once upon a time. Buddhism had swept the minds of all kinds of societies, and Vedantism pierced through the haze of distinction made between men. Trained in such traditions it was not impossible for the new generations, harassed by the menace of conversion, to have a taste of the fruits of equality where the dire illogicality of caste and untenability of the inhuman system of untouchability had been forcefully rejected time and again.

Sufism finally had to build the bridge. True, it was not conventional Hinduism. It was Arabic, it was Persian. Its greatest texts and literature were written in Islamic languages, and the followers, and especially their masters, were held in the greatest regard by the common populace.

But even the Sufis basically follow Islam, and do not form a part of the accepted Hindu society. Something answering the force and merits of Sufism but wearing a veneer of the orthodox Hinduism had to appear and fill the breach. The answer had to come, and it came from the budding religion of Love, Vaishnavism, a religion that preached love and equality.

It had a dream beginning. Some of the greatest of the saints, greatest of the Acharyas (philosophic teachers), not only preached the inspired message, but in the accepted mode and fashion of the orthodox school, they ably debated the whole problem in open intellectual combats. Great books were written in the process. Vaishnavism had come to stay. Between the 8th and 11th centuries, the Indian mind was busy assimilating the Islamic idea of one God with the Hindu idea of one love. The product was Vaishnavism, the Bawuls, the Nateras, the Sufi-Sainthood.

Guru Ramananda in the West and Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in the East offered the brotherly religion of equality and fraternity built on a spiritual philosophy which claimed its ascent from the philosophies of Vedanta, Upanishads and Samkhya. There was Guru Nanak who had travelled up to the lands of the Islamic core, visiting even Mecca itself; and there was Ballabhacharya, Ramanuja and Madhavacharya in the South. Narsi Mehta, Mira Bai, Tulsidas, Surdas, Kabir, Janandeva and a host of others sang of the Lord, and through singing alone attempted to bring back the balance in a society that had got upset through greedy alien aggressions.

Although Baghadad was regarded as the religious headquarters of Islam, and the Sunni creed was the official creed, the people of the riverlands of Mesopotamia were moulded in a softer temperament, as river-valley people are. They supported the Sufis in great numbers and with open hands. Sufi saints, scholars, and poets were seen being tortured by the orthodox followers of Islam. They sought martyrdom for loving their God as a part of the life.

They, instead of holding their God in great divine fear, talked about Him endearingly, loving Him as the most precious part of their soul. This divine love was their chief motivation in following the religious path. They lived and died for their special relationship with the divine, and they were proud of it.

The tortures they had suffered at the hands of the ruling divines of the land have left in history a trail of horror, disgust and sympathy. They were considered traitors and heretics. Thus they had to meet martyrdom under the judgement of the Mullahs and the Quazis.

Some of the greatest luminaries of the Mesopotamian and Persian life and thought had sacrificed their lives for the conviction they treasured about the loving relationship they had cultivated as existing between their personal souls (*Jivaatmaa* = *Farhad*) and their God (*Paramaatmaa* = *Shirin*). The fanatic (from Arabic *fana* meaning self-immolation for a cause) idea of 'love-lover-beloved' or '*Isque-Aasique and Maa'shuque*' inspired a host of philosophically advanced worthies.

This idea of sacrifice for an adored faith gave rise to the later and much more treasured idea of surrender and sacrifice (*prapatti*) in love, or in the religion of love, Bhakti.

In Bhakti or Prema, the idea of *fana* had etched out for itself a firm and deep shelter. We hear even the modern poet Rabindranath Tagore again and again coming back to this theme of self-sacrifice for the sake of the love-divine in his hundreds of poems: "...*bhaalo mondo milaaye shakali, ebaar pujaaye taai aaponarey ditey chaai boli*...I crave to lay down my life for my love for Him/Her with all my good or/and all my bad. I am ready to sacrifice my all, my life, for the sake of my love."

What the Sufi saints and divines called *fana* was designated by the Tantric counterparts as *Bali*, and by the Vaishnava saints as *seva* and *sharanam* or *prapatti*. The Vaishnava cult believed in a personal love for the inner God for whom nothing was too personal or too precious to be sacrificed where the Beloved was concerned.

Sri Krishna Chaitanya of Nadia was murderously attacked and injured by two notorious brigands whom he wanted to reform. But his reaction to the attack was love. He said, "No matter you have laid me down, and I am wounded, yet before I die please tell me once that you love my Lord, the God of Love." That was his form of conversion. And he converted many of the non-Hindus and many of the downtrodden.

The Vaishnavism or the religion of love which these saints preached at the time brought about a big change in the minds of even the greatest of the philosophers. So serious were they about propagating the new religion that they began to write treatises extolling the doctrines of *archa* (loving attention), *seva* (service), *pooja* (worship), *aaraadhanaa* (constancy leading to meditation), *prapatti* (service), *tadgati* (annihilation) and various other fundamental but extremely sensitive and psychological techniques.

These were meant to bring peace and harmony to the disturbed emotions which despised men for one man-created excuse or another. The methods they adopted, the books they wrote, and the songs they sang, convinced the general mass as well as the learned upper class individuals to treat all men, all creatures with tender humane considerations.

Under the new dispensations, they were happy to treat all lives as abodes of the one and only Lord who resided within all loving hearts. Love was God to them, and God was total Love and Sacrifice. To consider all lives as brother-lives was a cardinal belief of these Vaishnavas.

Besides the great Gita (in the Mahabharata), the sublime Bhagavatam and many of the Puranas were written in support of this religion of love, of which the two outstanding contributions are the Narada Bhakti Sutram, and the Shandilya Bhakti Sutram. Chapters were added to the Ramayana and the Mahabharata in support of this religion, and Bhakti as a mode of sadhana was firmly established through a series of writings such as *'Pancha-Ratram'*, and a tract *'Nrisingha-Tapani'*.

In considering the religion of Bhakti in its real perspective, one must take into consideration the sacrifices and the travails of a number of saints who as lovers of God, lovers of man, gained as high a position in the estimation of the people as to be considered next to God Himself. Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was one of them. Sant Jnaneshwara, Narsi Mehta, Guru Ramananda, Goswami Tulsidas were others.

They firmly believed, at least in theory, that a sincere lover of God is in himself or herself divine in spirit. So many of these God-lovers now emerged in different parts of India that an age of love actually took over from the age of empty scholarship and phony Vedism. These celebrated saints, who mesmerized the public, wrote and sang beautiful songs which are as popular today as they had been seven hundred years back.

It is difficult to resist from offering some samples of the type of mystic love that these hearts stung by divine love sang about. Let us sample some of these gems:

(a) Far off lies the port;
Ah, if only I could reach early and set sail.
But I have not a penny to spare,
Nor a farthing stands to my credit!
How then could I take the boat?
O Captain, my captain, be kind.
Offer me Thy hand
That I could meet my Beloved across the seas?

(Bullah Shah)

(b) The handful of songs I have collected
Provide me with the meagre shells
With which I hope to pay my Ferryman
When I am ready to Cross-Over.

(Tagore)

(c) Remove Thy veil,
You shall meet your Beloved.
That darling peeps through many a form,
Take care before you spare a harsh word.

(Kabir)

(d) Remove once Thy Veil, do remove O beloved.
The clouds are dark; the woods are quiet;
A languorous breeze blows across;
The nights are laden with jasmine fragrance,
The moonshine spreads out;
Croon in soft melodies what your heart wants
to repeat.

(Tagore)

(e) In my dream I met my Beloved;
And now I am afraid to open my eyes,
Lest I lose even the taste of the dream.

(Kabir)

(f) When the evening came, the Chakvi* wept and said,
'Wing out Beloved to the Land where there is no
night; wing to the Land of Eternity, of Light
and Bliss.'
(Kabir)

*(Chakvi = a bird who separates from his beloved companion at nightfall)

(g) Do not ask how I felt that Love-Night!
The better I want to describe, the fresher grows my joy.
Birth after birth we two have been arm in arm,
Birth after birth the same Love, the same Heart......
Yet, for fulfilment? Where is it? Ah, where?
(Vidyapati)

(h) Light? Where is that Light?
Only the lamp is lying dead on the floor,
And the flame is missing!
What a lot!
Better it were if I too were dead.
(Tagore)

(i) The August rains are here!
It's pouring and pouring;
But my chamber lies dead and empty!!
And I am alone.
(Vidyapati)

(j) I and my beloved are one in Love; then
where is the separation, where the pain?
(Mansoor)

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The sincerity and ecstasy of these poets had held in grip the godly hearts in India from the 13th to the 16th centuries, and the tradition they left still vibrates in the literature and songs which the devotees sing in and around places where devotion is worth the while, and where brother-hearts throb in the same manner.

There appeared one after the other a number of these saintly beings. The pressure of the sudden upsurge of a violent Islam, and the associated threats to life and ideals, brought out a change in the general outlook of the masses towards the new alien faith. The age-old Brahmanistic ways were forced to remodel.

Many Brahmanas themselves became aware of the need to fraternise with the depressed classes, the rejected castes, even with the devoted converts and Islamic population in general, by appealing to the inner spirit of their beings. So strong was the appeal, so ardent were their prayers, that the chords of human sympathy forced the common mass, irrespective of caste and creed, to follow the beautifully humane path of love as advocated by them.

Of course the compositions of Jnanadeva, inspired hymn-composers like Kabir, Meera Bai, Bullah Shah, and Guru Nanak created amongst the common devotees, who looked out for any kind of encouragement, the capacity to embrace all devotees above the restrictions of caste and creed. It was, as it were, a general demand for the establishment of a liberal kind of popular religion. And this was the religion of love, or Bhakti, preached by the great saints of 13th, 14th, 15th and 16th centuries. What was started in the 9th century with Vedanta's *Soham* (I am He) ultimately fruitioned into the full-fledged creed of love, Bhakti.

Of these, the most brilliant reforming poet was Goswami Tulsidas. He was a Brahmin of Uttar Pradesh and his main work was achieved in the hot bed of orthodox Brahmanism, Kashi (Varanasi), where he lived and died after achieving the immortal work known as the *Ramacharita Manasa*, an epic on the lines of the famed *Ramayana* by Valmiki.

Whereas the *Ramayana* of Valmiki was regarded as the special preserve of the Sanskrit-knowing Brahmins alone, *Ramcharit Manasa*, from the start, was projected to assist the mass to whom Sanskrit was a closed language. With his personal experience, Tulsidas felt that the mass needed a powerful book on an equally powerful theme in their own rustic language of everyday. He was determined to reach them in spite of the threats from the interested, who never could stomach the idea of the mass rushing into and flooding out their close kept preserve.

Naturally his approach, as well as his superlative achievements were found to be unique, quite apart from the classical literary execution of Valmiki. His epic was soaked with the 'milk of human kindness'. *Ramacharita Manasa* was a treatise of the same tradition of Bhakti, which aimed at emancipating the downtrodden from the severe grips of Brahmanism.

5

YAM BRAHMHAA VARUNENDRA RUDRA-MARUTAH
STUNVANTI DIVYAI STAVAI-R
VEDAIH SAANGAPADAIH KRAMOPA-NISHADAI-R
GAAYANTI YAM SAAMAGAAH
BHAANAAVAASTHITA-TAD-GATENA MANASAA
PASHYANTI YAM YOGINO
YASYAANTAM NA VIDUH SURAA-SURA-GANAAH
DEVAAYA TASMAI NAMAH

—SHREE DHARA

I bow to that Spirit to Whom bring obeisance Brahamaa,[1] Varnma,[2] Indra,[3] Rudra,[4] Marutas,[5] by addressing peals of etheral prayers; to Whom the Saman-Singers raise their psalms in Vedic and Upanishad verses; Whom the Yogins in their concentrated fixed vision see through their meditation; or/and Whose limits have not been measured either by the Suras or by the Asuras in their deepest contemplation.

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1. The Spirit of Creation;
2. The World of Cosmic Moisture;
3. The Ruling Spirit over the Cosmic Equilibrium;
4. The Final Assimilator of all Creation;
5. The Spirit of the Cosmic Winds.

Chapter Five

SUMMING UP

I

Often the Vedic scholars quote such lines as "He desired for progenies; and wanted a second...He felt bored of singleness, and wished for a second...He wanted 'to pray', and found a second by splitting Himself", etc.

As I read these lines, and read the implications of the lines, I cannot help thinking that singleness is a profoundly boring lot. I feel good to think that companionship is a natural expression, a natural condition of every being. Life entertains, in the interest of its own expression and consummation, the supreme gift of companionship, which of course is a precondition of Life.

In the words 'kama' (in Praja-kama), or 'Aichhat,' or 'Ramate', which literally mean 'Desire', 'Wish' and 'Taking delight in duality' respectively, the meaning which lies hidden or unexpressed is the expression 'Love'. He wanted to love, or to make love. The mysterious aphony in the rich language of Sanskrit about the expression 'I love you', could perhaps be explained by the facts that in explaining the origin of Life the ancients assumed that in the verbs 'desire', 'wish', 'causing to create', 'feeling bored or lonely, or even afraid (through an opaque stillness and vastness)', the implication of 'I wish you', or 'I wish you were here' is understood.

Sanskrit, instead, uses the expressions 'you please me', 'I wish you', 'Be pleasant to me', 'Give me Thy Company', etc. The word in Sanskrit for Love is Prema; the verb (nearest) is 'priyate', 'appear to please', etc. But never, 'I love you'.

The frank disposition of Life in those days, when men lived by natural union, and not through any man-imposed cremonials, the mental involvement between two individuals received more honour, and easy acceptance than otherwise.

Soon man realized that the Love for union for reproduction is not entirely satisfying. Love, in order to supersede the span of life and demands of reproduction, has to achieve some spiritual sublimation, which rises above carnality restricted by the demands of Time. Love, in order to be love, has to transcend the limitations of earthiness. It has to be an expression of some sublime desire. That desire, in order to be fulfilled, has to seek something other than Space, even other than Time.

The Vedic thought hardly noted this aspect of love. Since in their way of life the Devas or Gods came as bestower of benefits against some kind of ritualistic gifts, since the Gods would be Gods if they gave to the praying multitude good rains, good crops, good health, victory in battles, etc., no expectations for any mental equilibrium, or spiritual satisfaction was ever expected of the Devas.

Spiritualism entered the Aryan life from the enquiries we find planted within the pages of the Upanishads. In the Tapovanas the younger students who had been given to the studies of the Vedas, were filled with spiritual enquiries. As such, the Upanishads constitute a glorious library of free thinking and spiritual enquiries of the highest and subtlest stamp.*

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* 1. Kaamas-tad-agre samavartata = Rg. Veda X: 129-4.
2. So 'akamayata bahusyam prajayeyeti = Taittiriya II: 6:1.

(continued next page)

The first glimpse of emotional enquiries in matters spiritual and religious, was seen in sermons of the Buddha whose ministrations were addressed primarily to the inner conscience of the common mass of people who had been basically children of the soil, and as such highly emotional, being victims of the vicissitudes of life and its cruel demands. Wealth and power deaden the finer feelings in men. Only the mass, brought up in pain, fear, misery and poverty, nurture fellow-feeling, and care for emotional contact.

Even before the Buddha the same people labouring under these handicaps had been looking forward to a way to the Divine intercession. They knew the Yajnas were not their way. They usually had their own traditional tribal way of falling flat before the Earth Mother, the Sky Father, and the Brother Winds and the Sister Seasons, rivers and lakes. But all these were dominated by the Mother, who provided them with whatever spiritual sustenance they had been looking for. Without the natural assistance given this traditional Tantrik way they could gather, was their own way to approach the Supreme.

It was a way based on love and understanding, fear and deference, prostration and submission. This way, for the first time, received a new direction only with the advent of the Buddha. The mass, therefore, fell for the orthodox Buddhism, and later on, as time progressed caught up with the essence of Buddhism: love, sympathy, fellow-feeling, charity, service, tolerance and sacrifice.

Let us consider these Buddhistic qualities which so transformed the society that within a remarkably short time the basic tenets, which covered up principally all the ailments

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3. Prajaakams van Prajaapati: sa tapo'atapyata sa tapah taptva so mithunamupadyate. Rayi cha pranam cha—Prashna I:4:5.
4. Sa vai naiva Reme tasmaad ekaaki na ramate sa dvitiyam aichhat—Br. Arn: I:4:3.

of the universal society of man swept over the entire human world of the time. We must bear in mind that this transformation came entirely through oral ministrations, examples, and a far-reaching sympathetic vibration. No force was used; no threat was held; no destruction or humiliation followed the transformation. The change quickly overwhelmed through an entirely peaceful and spiritual progress.

The picture of the Buddhist monks roaming by themselves without any physical protection robbed the robbers of the desire to distrub them, or the brigands to harass them. Their simplicity, sincerity, lack of greed and fear provided them with the necessary shield and armour of protection. From Antioch and Athenium to distant Canton and Peking these monks roamed all over the world with their messages of *Pancha-Sheela*, the *Tripitaka* and wherever possible, with their messages of service and charity.

Even the ancient tribal system of Tantra gradually found it much more rewarding to make room for the Buddhistic tenets within their high ritualistic forms of worship of Nature, of the natural calamities, of Fear, Death, Disease and Destruction, side by side with the Benign, Kind, Compassionate and Graceful Buddha and his sermons.

Within Buddhism a good bit of local forms and rituals came to nestle as a new form. There was a mixture of Buddhism and Tantricism.

Out of this syncretization new forms of Buddhistic Tantra came: such as Mahayana, Hinayana, and specially Vajrayana with He-Vajra and Vajra-Varahi as their important deities, as well as other deities—Tara, Prajna-Paramita, Kalantaka and specially Saraswati, Marichi and Marisha.

With deities came rituals; and with rituals came emotional involvement.

It is in this way that the dour, dry Vedantism, based entirely on the Vedic and Upanishad logic and thinking, quietly and gradually melted into the emotional depictions in the Epics and Puranas.

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The popularity of Jainism and Buddhism had waned in the subcontinent by the 14th century. Brahmanism found in Islam a formidable challenge. But such was the philosophical make-up of the Indian mind that it could not entirely reject to the point of complete deletion and effacement any contribution to philosophic or religious thought. In the mental make-up of the Indian mind 'acceptance, consideration and tolerance' formed a feature. 'One great peculiarity', says Dr. R.C. Majumdar in his contribution to "The History and Culture of the Indian People" (Vol. VI), 'of Indian culture is that it adds to, but seldom altogether supersedes, the old institutions and faithfully preserves, as far as possible, all relics of the past, even though they are hidden or changed beyond recognition, by later growth.'

Islam had established itself in India by the 12th-13th centuries, and Hindu life faced the greatest menance in its history through a passionate determination to destroy everything that was not Islam. Coexistence as an idea never appeared in an Islamic dictionary. But in this India the Hindus were not the only victims. Religions much more ancient than Islam, and much more elaborate and powerful, had fallen by the roadside like nine-pins, never to rise again. The elaborate establishments of those religions made poets sing panegyrics of the grandeur, splendour and power of those fortified temples embellished with all facilities for feast, entertainments and rituals.

Such greatness cannot just be whisked away only under military pressure, which was deprived of logic, feeling, philosophic depth and soul-convictions. The forms get smashed and deformed, but the hunger in the Soul lingers through the embers the holocaust leaves behind. Arms and brutality can silence voice; but can never quell aspirations. The death of idealism is never wrought by steel and gunpowder.

The great religions of the Medes survived through the new institutions historical events established throughout the South of India. Not only in their structural massiveness, or formal technicalities and details, but in spirit and underlying dedicative submission in the high estimation of the hierarchy of the priestly cadres also, the temple institutions of the South let flow a welcome breeze of minute detailed recapitulation of the lost grandeur of the temple-culture of the Medes.

One of the abiding traditions that the temple-tradition had contributed was to entertain the Gods through dances, songs and music. Any number of hymns were composed to this effect. The poets, along with the musicians and the dancing girls, constituted an important branch of this form of temple-culture that entered India through the South, patronized by such saints as Sage Vaikhanasa, from whom Ramunuja, and the Hindu world learnt a lot.

What was true of the eastward migration of the Medes-Babylonian culture was also true of certain abiding characteristics that were left to stick against the Sunna of Islam, in spite of its strict and severe antipathy towards ritualistic dances and songs.

These features with a strong socio-religious bias had affected the life-form of the Middle East, particularly of Mesopotamia, Syria and Iran. As in the Indian subcontinent, in the Medes too, the devout ancients, daring the bloodthirsty new trends, sought spiritual solace and liberation through such emotional features as free congregations, dances, drinks and songs, specially songs seeking the companionship of a loving God in the spirit of a boon lover. Such spiritually inspired love eulogized for its content no ulterior motive of lust, sex or lasciviousness, but of an undeniable, inevitable and undying love of the form for the spirit, of the famished personal soul for the unaffected subjective soul *per se*, which they felt to be always there.

These later day spiritual individualists formed by themselves a very strong metaphysical brotherhood, and were called Sufis, because of the *saaf* or clean and 'open' ways.

So strongly biased were the views and philosophy of the Sufis, so appealing were their simple liberal ways, so touching were their songs and dances that soon they were encouraged by a large following.

The conservatives did not view this growth with any kindly eye, and before long came upon them with an iron hand.

But the movement could not stop, primarily because most of the thinking people, theological savants included, accepted Sufism wholeheartedly, and were ready to stake their property, family and life in defence of their philosophic convictions, which soon became their faith.

Basically, they followed the Koran, and accepted Hazrat Muhammad as their avowed prophet and leader. They were proud to consider themselves as followers of Islam. Yet philosophically they believed that their Soul of Souls was both transcendental and phenomenal, humane and divine.

This highly polemical and debatable position was the coveted playground of the highest intellectual and philosophical savants of the day, most of whom were dedicated servants of God, and lived the open life of scholarly saints.

As a results, almost all of them have left behind great treatises in prose and poetry that have enriched not only the literature of Arabia and Iran, but of the whole civilized world. Mankind would be a poorer lot without the writings of Omar Khyyam, Hafiz, Jalaluddin Rumi, Amir Khusrav, or such poems as Gul-e-vakavali, Shirin Farhad, Laila Maznu and many others. Courts of great kings and conquerers bought the presence of these poets who sang of God as a sublime unseen lover, prostrating their own lives as sacrifices before the altar of their object of love. This Subject-Object relationship was so convincing to them, so dear, that they again and again declared passionately that 'I and my Beloved are One'. In Love you seek your union with your own Self. Ultimately as a climax they said, 'I am He', or 'Au-ul-Haq'

This was blasphemy. And at times a mass slaughter took pace to stop their singing and preaching forever. But the height of free thinking once ignited cannot be put out by tyranny and monstrosity. Some of the greatest saints of this period, and some of the most educated and cultured minds were put to the sword for their spiritual conviction.

It was not an ordinary or superfluous conviction. This conviction was virtually a treasured heirloom of the past ancestors of these thinkers.

From Egypt to Cyprus and Greece, from the worshippers of reputed Oriental divinities from Syria Iraq, Mesapotamia and Palestine, from the Hellenic isles to the fire-worshippers of Azerbaijan, Iran and the Medes, great and powerful religious forms with great and powerful gods and institutions, and with great and numerous followings could not have been wiped out by a flash of the sword. Ideas live on much after the votaries die.

And the traditon of realizing a universal God beyond the formal representation of a temple-bound God inspired great saints, and made them sing of the Universal Soul as the Beloved of all.

The idea ran through the Middle East and the frontiers of India. Together with the Greeks, Parthians who had settled on the frontiers of India, the idea of a Universal Soul ran through the land already saturated with the idea of the Universal Brahman. The cry of Au-ul-Haq (or I am He) was not a distant cry from the Vedic idea 'Aham Brahmasma', or 'So'ham'.

Naturally, the new Sufi trend, as the new form was called, gained ground in India. Although the Sufis, by virture of their conversion to Islam, remained a branch of the great Islamic brotherhood, because of their liberalism, and their professed belief in one Godhead as a great Lover, and in one great family of Mankind as His Beloved, the Sufists as well as the basic philosophy of Love which the Sufis cultivated and popularized, Sufism as such brought in a new trend in India.

Tantricism, the worship of God as a Father, but more so as a Mother, had already prepared a ground for imagining God-Love as Love on a personal plane. Emotionalism in religious relationship was neither new to the tribal India, nor to the mystic India. The great interlude of Buddhism, particularly the popularity of Gautama Buddha's personal life and its appeal, injected into the stolid premises of vedantism the element of this emotion. This, in fact, was one of the chief reasons for the Great Schism that broke the Buddhist organization in two parts—Mahayana and Hinayana.

Now, after the Greek and Kushan episodes (4th century—the new Christian era), when the Indian mind was experiencing a new kind of 'worship' with images, forms, temples, etc., and when the temple worship had become a part of Indian life, came the rolling menace of forced conversion, blood and destruction.

Against this background the advent of a tolerant form of Islamic brotherhood, complete with dance, music and metaphysical poetry at once caught the popular imagination, and Hindus were looking forward to a transformation of this order within the Hindu fold.

The opportunity was provided by two vagrant but extremely vibrant sects. One of these, the Nathas, had very ancient antecedents, and could be traced to the hilly tribes of the Himalayas given to a mystic order of spiritual dispensation, but believing in promiscuity as no bar to spiritual attainment.

And the second, more popular sect is that of the Bawuls, a very popular, grass roots sect who sing and dance their way through the villages, always reminding men of the eternal bond of love existing between the outer and the inner Man. The Bawuls distinctly favour companionship and free role of Love, which appeals to the soul by ignoring the body, and the lust for the material possessiveness in life.

There is, if any, very little ephermeral difference between the Bawuls and the Sufis. In fact, the Sufi shrines, which spread all over the length and breadth of India are frequent and favourite haunts of the Bawuls.

Both these mix very well, metaphysically, culturally and temperamentally. Both hold on to the Idea of Love of the Universal Spirit as a part and parcel of their individual spirit.

In the songs of the Sufis, as in those of the Bawuls, the idea of Love, Lover and the Beloved comes again and again to explain all kinds of metaphysical puzzles. In Sufism there have been very eminent female saints, and so it has been amongst the Bawuls, where both males and females living together in human friendship have composed and sung indeed great metaphysical poems saturated with the spirit of Divine Love.

I refrain from quoting some of these songs; but I do suggest humbly to those who seek God-companionship through human companionship to visit some of these Sufi and Bawul shrines (wherever they are). The Bawuls being virtually roving minstrels, really build no shrine. Yet there are "Akharas" which Bawuls do maintain in secret spots all over Northern India, specially in Bengal, Bangladesh and Orissa.

II

The impact of Islam, Sufism and Buddhistic nihilism affected the Indian mind in a profound way by bringing India out of a possible nihilism provoked by a decadent Buddhism and then by a sapless Vedantism which advocated Advaitism which really appeared to be old Buddhist nihilism in a new pot of Shankaracharya's interpretation of *Badarayana's Uttara Mimansa* or *Vedanta*.

Shankara's chief aim was to drive the Buddhist nihilism away from the land of India and bring back the glory that was Vedism. He was successful in this to a very large extent, although within some of the Hindu rites some Buddhist traits are palpably traceable. Some of the Buddhist deities have found place in the Hindu pantheon. To name a few, Tara, Kali, Saraswati are some of these deities. Buddhism and Tantra have taken shelter in Brahmanical rituals.

Since Love and the religion of Love did not form a part of Buddhism the new religion of Bhakti was openly cultivated by the Bawuls and the Nathas, as well as the Tantrics.

But its greatest exponents were the four Acharyas of the South, and simultaneously with them the Sufis held their grounds. In between came the great Bawuls.

Both the Bawuls and the Sufis quickly discovered their spiritual affinity with the Vaishnavism, and many of the renowned Sufis sang songs in praise of the favoured Gods like Rama and Krishna who were mentioned as the supreme Godheads.

This spiritual brotherhood, one of the most glorious chapters of Indian spiritualism, was started on the one hand by Amir Khusrav, and on the other hand by Swami Ramanand, the Guru of the great Kabir.

All this happened within a span of four to five hundred years, and included the growth of Bhakti from Sankar's Advaita to Madhva's clear-cut Dvaita where knowledge or

Jnana is considered as a clean basis for finding Bhakti as the ultimate source for final illumination. Bhakti was accepted as a pulsating attachment that surpasses the intellectual satisfaction of Love. It is Bhakti that grants the final union and the ecstatic thrill of sublime realization. Madhva is quite explicit in establishing his theory over every other opinion, inclusive of yoga, Samkhya and above all Shankaracharya. Madhva's insistence on the pleasures of beatitude obtainable through complete dedication and final 'Union' with God gave Vaishnavism that flavour which we taste in the Sufi thoughts that had flooded the Deccan, specially the Vijayanagara empire inclusive of Mysore.

Nimbarka and Ballabhacharya carried Bhakti even further, and attempted to dramatize Bhakti along the lines of the lengendary life of Krishna as depicted in the Bhagavatam. In dramatic initiation the devotees indulged in displaying the 'Leela'-s of the Gopis with their adoring symbolized idol of the hunt, viz., Govinda.

This, of course, was a far cry from Ramanuja in whom both logic and Vendanta always played a guiding and restraining part. For him, Krishna or Rama was a deity. For Madhva and Ballabha these were realities, and the milkmaids offered the examples of bhakti, Sharanagati, Prapatti. Ramanuja's Rama sat on a pedestal and received all kinds of ovation and offerings; Madhava, the frank and open Dualist found his God a living proposition to be owned, behaved, handled and loved.

Ramanuja's way was 'to please' God; and was called '*Tushti Marga*'; and Madhva's was known as 'Pushti', or indulging way.

This last approach reminds one of the Sufi attitude towards God, and accepting God as a Lover in Spirit and Flesh, hating no human act as demeaning. There is a very famous Vaishnava hymn by Ballabhacharya, sung all over India, known as Madhurasbakam. That poem more than describes the thrill of complete dedication to God in all physical aspects.

Sufi poetry too is filled with such exhilarating sentiments. And this was not much different from the later literature that had flooded Bengal, Bihar and Orissa through the Vaishnavism, specially Gandiya Vaishnavism preached by Sree Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. In order to appreciate this statement one has only to read the vast treasure of the Vaishnava literature starting from Jayadeva's *Gita-Govindam* and spreading through lilts of Vidyapati, Chandidasa and the scores of 'Pada-Kartas' who have blazed the course of poetry in the lower Gangetic plains.

Side by side ran the Sufi, but more, the Bawul poems. The total mass and attainments of the Bawul poems is simply astounding for the fact that Hindus, Moslems, and even Christains fell for their emotional depth, spiritual reach and utter unnerving frank simplicity of language. Rural Bengal breathes through these poems, and spiritual yearnings pulsate in every word.

All other kinds of spiritual expressions had their rises and falls; but the touching compositions of the rural Bawul songs have been continually enrapturing masses over a vast area, and over a very long time.

The strong vibrations of the Sufi and Bawul songs can be felt even today. Talks and debates about Ramanuja and Shankara, Nimbarka and Madhva, Nanak and Kabir, Shankaracharya and Mandan Misra and Kumaril would one day pale into faded memory, but the songs of Nanak and Kabir, of the Bawuls and the Sufis, of Amir Kusrav and Jnanadeva, Meerabai and Bullah Shah would continue to inspire the lives of those who, having found the glorified spectacle of creation get enchanted with the perennial beauty and charm of the inner world which Man alone has discovered and finds it worthwhile to cultivate and discover.

The Gaurudiya devotion which followed the path of Chaitanya in order to bring in a kind of solution between the controversy of Advaita and Dvaita introduced a new theory known as *Achintya-Bheda-Abheda*. This was fully exposed by Roopa Goswami and particularly by Jeeva Goswami whose work *Ujjala Neelamani and Bhakti Rasamrita Sindhu* occupies the same high position in Vaishnava literature as Narada Bhakti Sutra or Shandilya Bhakti Sutra or the Pancharatra treatises.

The Bangiya Vaishnavas following the path of Sree Chaitanya concentrated on a special type of Bhakti known as Krishna-Bhakti. For them all Love is congealed in Sri-Krishna, and all its moods find their full expression in *Krishna-Keertana*, which means getting lost in the musical renditions of the joy in thinking, speaking and singing of the different Leelas of Krishna Vasudeva of Brindavana.

Man, the Gaurudiya Vaishnavas think, is naturally endowed with an inner sleeping power of self-realizations. This is quite close to the Tantra power of sleeping consciousness, or *Sleeping Serpent*, or *Kula Kundalini*, which when awakened arouses the supra-conscious state of the faculties of man.

Bhakti, similarly, stores this power, and helps arouse it. Extreme form of Bhakti merges the *Saguna* (qualified) *Atman* with the *Nirguna* (unqualified) *Atman*. *Jiva* and *Brahman* are related like sands and water, each eager to meet the other, and get merged into it for future friction and growth. In this respect the *Jiva* and the *Atman*, though viewed as two in the course of arguments, are indeed One.

The 9th Chapter of the Gita suggests this when it says, "All *bhutas* subsist in Me" and immediately qualifies the statement by saying that "*Bhutas* do not envelop and absorb Me. All are in Me, but that is not All; All far extends all dimensions conceived in human calculations."

This is an attempt to locate the position of the Divine in all His creations. When seen, as is seen, all things around as 'things', and as separate, they indeed look separate, although superficially; in fact, and to deeper insight all things are really nestled in One, and that One is Vasudeva Sri Krishna.

This concept is quite away from how Ramanuja accepts his God. He accepts that all formal deities ultimately melt into the One unqualifed '*Nirmala*,' '*Niranjana*,' '*Nirupadhika*'; yet, he, Ramanuja can only concentrate on the deified Rama form, whom he adores, worships and loves.

The Jiva and the Brahman in this way are not indeed One, though they are not separate. This Gaudiya Vaishnava stand is known as *Achintya-Beda-bheda*, which, in the religion of Love is a novel contribution.

This is very close to the concepts of the Sufi saints, who regard the Body and the Soul as finally inseparable. This is plastically expressed in the models of Radha-Krishna in united form when both look separately inseparable. To see them as separate is to cause disaster, catastrophe, tragedy as is depicted in the Sufi stories of Laila and Majnun, Shirin and Farhad; or in the formula of Ishque-Asshique and Maa'shuq. This is the ultimate sublime theory of the Mystery of Unity in Diversity, or what the *Gaudiya Vaishnavas*, particularly Jeeva Goswami called *Achintya Bheda-bheda*.

In Gaudiya Vaishnavism this dualism as has been viewed is Real, Necessary and Vital; which is not the case with the Jnana-Marga of Advaita, which makes no compromise with dualism and, particularly, emotionalism.

If we have been following so far the gradual evolution and construction of Bhakti and Vaishnavism we cannot escape the urgency of the ardent yearning of the Vaishnavas to enjoy a 'union' with the Ultimate. This hankering about the Union, we may now note, has been coming down a long long tradition. In that tradition the 'mother-child' relationship gradually turned into the Lover-Beloved relationship. For over a very long time the Christian church, based on the Jehova-Jupiter tradition was quite reluctant to accept the mother-child concept. In course of time they had to accept it; but Islam stuck to Oneness, and Allah, without a second. This went contrary to the pre-Islamic beliefs current in Greece, Jerusalem, Syria and Mesopotamia where a Mother (sometimes with many breasts; sometimes with pronounced fertility) was adored.

Islam destroyed all of this. Swords cannot destroy ideas, and aspirations. Human subjectivity suffers no pressure. The desire to love and adore something lovable and adorable cannot be throttled unless law could stop a Mother from kissing her child. Certain effusions of emotion have been planted by Nature in all lives; and these emotive features act as adhesive cements between the life that was, the life that is and the life that has yet to come. The wheel of life, like all wheels, requires, for correct functioning, certain lubricants. Emotion and affection, love and care function as lubricants to the irresistible rotating drama that is life. The place of Bhakti and Love is secure in Divine pursuits because of this elemental law.

The forest-dwelling primitives knew it, and cultivated it. They worshipped natural features, and specially the Mother. That inter-national, inter-racial, inter-social way of regarding Nature as Mother was universal. Anthropologists like Dr Fraser have quoted numerous instances all over the globe of the loveable trait in primitive concept of worship. These had been so dominant and insistent, universal and inter-social that as Tantra the practice is followed even today. This is not Hindu, neither Islamic nor Pagan; this is primitive, tribal, universal; and so this is Tantra. Love and care, mystery and magic are its primal features. Death and dead bodies are as real to their vision as life and projection of new life.

The pagan oriental religions, and the Egyptian versions of temple worship too emphasized on the maternal and paternal idioms of prayers and worship. Bhakti's undercurrent had been flowing through the love of Isis and Horus. After the death and destruction of Horus, Isis has been in search for the parts of his body even now. So was, in Hindu myths, Siva or Hara searching for the parts of the body of his beloved Isi, or Isani. In all myths 'love', 'yearning', 'waiting' or 'searching' for the Beloved plays its emotional part. In Judaic myths too 'in the dead of night' the agitated woman goes out in search of her 'Beloved'. She searches, but does not find Him.

It is only when Islam came with a stern hand this spell was attempted to be broken. It was broken; would have been broken; but so elemental, so insistent, so real was the nature of this longing that a wise, devoted and dedicated group of highly spiritual savants broke through the rigidity, and took to the roads to eternity as Sufi daredevil mendicants, who, having nothing, had nothing to lose except their own lives. By sacrificing that life they proved the seriousness of their sacrifice and quest. The main features of Bhakti as a special religion of Love are thus noticeable in these Sufis of the Middle East. The vast literature as well as the rich spiritual tradition they have left behind, from Ur, Basra, Baghdad to Kashmir, Delhi, Rajasthan, Hyderabad and practically the entire length and breadth of the lower Gangetic plains still vibrate with emotional fervour, and spiritual wealth.

The Sufi love and tradition had overcome India between eleventh and seventeenth centuries when great emperors and kings fell under its spell. The later 'Slave-Emperors' of Delhi and the early 'Khilji' ones actually extended their patronage to them, and the greatest savants of the time participated in their musics, kawalis, and dances in utter frenzic abandonment.

When the Vedantic movement had overtaken the religious world of Hindu India (then Buddhist India, 9th–14th centuries), its main aim was to destroy the classless and godless Jaina-Buddhist influence. Its chief aim was the re-establishment of the post-Vedic Sanatana (traditional) Hindu way. But instead, it got caught up with Platonic abstractions about idealism, formlessness, subjectivity, meditation and absolute, transcendental, evanescent impermanent nature of the world-drama (*Prapancha*). The great scholars from the 8th to the 13th centuries from Kashmir to the Tungabhadra and Kaveri were keenly engaged in polemics to prove that the only true God is the One that resides in the Mind, and all else is false.

Of course this ran contrary to shrine-religions, temple-religions and religions based on a personal relationship between Man and God, which the Sufis tried to evoke. And then all of a sudden the Acharyas appeared with their tomes of commentaries on the Vedanta and the Bhagavata literature. The Bhagavatam, the Gita and the Vaishnava psalms and lyrics such as *Geeta Govindam, Ujjala Neelamani, Bhakti-Rasamrita-Sindhu,* the Sankaracharya hymns such as *Ananda Lahari, Panchadasi, Mahimna-stotram* came to the forefront and were found recited from lip to lip.

In this a great contribution was made by the Gaudiya Vaishnavas led by Sree Krishna Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and his able followers Roopa Goswami and Jiva Goswami.

What with the movement of Vaishnavism and Sufism, the *Saguna* and *Nirguna Bhakti* flowed side by side, so that Sufi shrines and Bawul-Vairagi *Akharas* thrived by cheek and jowl never thinking of causing harm to anyone.

This stream was joined by the Shiva Bhaktas such as those whom Basavacharya had built up, and the love of the Mother spread from distant Hininglaz in Baluchistan to Taradevi in Kashmir, Jwalamukhi in Kangra to Kamakhya in Assam. Shrines of twelve *Jyotirlingas* spread all over India from the peaks of Kedarnath, Pashupatinath to Rameshwara near Cape Comorin.

All in all, the Sufis, the Bawuls, the Monks and the Vaishnavas all appeared to have been inspired by one single effusive religious ferment, Bhakti, the Religion of Love.

All over India *Keertana, Leela-Keertana, Krishna-Keertana, Kali-Keertanas* have become as popular as the songs of Kabir and Meerabai, Dadu and Nanak, Raidas, Dhana, Namdeva, Jnanadeva, Ramdas, Mansur, Tulsidas, Abu Said, Baba Farid, Jayadeva, Surdas, Jnaneshwara, Govindadas, Nazir, Bullah Shah, Lalone and Tagore. Without the wealth of this divine literature, without the melting pot of this Bhakti, a rigid Pandit-Mullah ridden iron jacket would long have suffocated the essential Religion of Love which characterises the peculiar features of the divinations regarding spiritualism which is the most valuable treasure of India's spiritual life. In no other part of the world so many religions have been practised in such close affinity as in India. Political disturbances apart, the common Indian man lives in a spirit of togetherness which is a wonder to the world outside. In no part of India God is a disputed item because in India God is not based on dogmas and lores, but on sheer pragmatism, liberalism and mutual love and sympathy which at the end of all halloo-balloo brings back sanity to mind, and love to heart.

Bhakti, the Religion of Love, is a special philosophy cultivated in India, and which has given a new dimension to the idea of religion that the world can understand, appreciate and adopt.

6

YA EKAVARNAM TAMASAH PARAM-YAT
ALOKYAM AVYAKTAM ANANTA-PAARAM
AASAN-CHAKAAROPA-SUPARNAM-ENAM
UPAASATE YOGA-RATHENA DHEERAAH

—VYASA

> ***The self-controlled souls worship through yogic contact the One—with no colour, yet beyond all darkness, the Immanent, Unexposed, the Unlimited Ultimate, and the Constant Friend living by The Innermost Heart.***
>
> (The Bhagavatam: VIII: 5:29)

Chapter Six

GOSWAMI TULSIDAS

(A Monument in the History of Bhakti)

So far we have been theorizing on the emotion of Bhakti, or Divine Love. In order to illustrate the actual message and purpose of the great impact of Bhakti on the human mind, and on human society in general we shall do well in studying the lives of those who have stood out the challenges of time as bright lighthouses in the practice of Divine Love.

These loving souls have been spread all over the world, and at all times, irrespective of differences of language, food, habits and even gods that they had been worshipping in their own way. The Divine reveals Himself in many ways. And every man nurses and adores his own God within himself.

All these distinctions melt away when the soul reaches for Divine experience of Love.

Thus no differences are observed in the emotional divine moods of the saintly souls of all climes, all cultures, all languages, crying for their beloved, or trying to reach the pinnacle of their loving experience. Enjoying God-love is a special privilege granted to a few blessed souls.

Tears of love, union, submission, dedication, or separation, all over the world express precisely the same tonal idiom of the inner soul. Sincere Love speaks the same language all the world over, and all along the immemorial times. Love uses a universal language.

The Judaic lyrics of the Song of Songs, the great psalms of the Bible, or the poems of Jalaluddin, or of St. John of the Cross, or the writings of St. Francis of Assisi, in their valued content, in depth of feeling and simplicity of expression carry the same message as the inspired poetical expressions in India of Vidyapati, Surdas, Meera or Tagore. The inherent spirituality of the words that express the agony and ecstasy of Divine Love convey the same meaning to those who care for expressions of Souls' agony for the union with the Beloved.

Differences of time and language have never stood in the way of emotional understanding of true love. Like hunger, sleep, sorrow, pain and sex the expression of intense Love, separation, union and complete dedication must for ever and ever remain the same all over the human world. The Sublime is a Universal feeling.

No Man or Woman could ever escape the scope and impact of True Love, Divine Love. Love by nature is elevating; it elevates him who loves; and him who has inspired that Love. In this ethereal sense Love is described as the wings of the Divine's immaculate flight from Nowhere to Somewhere.

Love is the binding force between object and object, material and material, life and life, known and unknown. Two separate identities through the forces of the medium of Love come closer together, come to meet a point of mutual identity only through a feeling of love, or, its denial, viz., hate. Hate separates, and breaks the whole into pieces; Love crystallizes and unites.

Love and hate thus play as sentiments of bondage and/or separation, integrity or disintegrity; making human living an experience of heaven or hell respectively. The point is that there must of necessity be some kind of relative interest between objects and objects, so that the world becomes and lives as a composite unit.

The formative characteristic of the world naturally looks forward to the forces of integration. The world desires to come together, in spite of its obvious disintegrating jars and fissures. Life looks forward to come to One, to become One.

Dismemberments are contrary to the eternal law of the Life-process. All deep expressions of life seek merging into Oneness. And this kind of Self-inspired and heaven-designed confluence, union, i.e., coming together of the two minds into one, in spite of all human designs and human efforts, has got to be heaven-sent and heaven-designed.

Love is a gift from the Unseen. Love is Divine Grace. It is never forced. To come to the Divine, to taste of the Divine, to live a life of devotedness to the Divine Love and Love alone is the only bridge, the only passport, the only visa to the Eternity of life. Escape Love, and escape the heavens.

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The spiritualists of the Middle Ages of India, who had come into contact with the noble thoughts flowing into the Upanishad-trained Indian mystics from the vast countries of Iran and Iraq, got immediately merged in the devotional discipline of the new streams of thought.

The onsalught from the Arabic West sweeping over a tornado tore through the fabric of thousands of years of ethics and discipline of the great lands of Iraq and Iran where spiritual thinking and practice had reached an all-time excellence and finesse. Barring certain practices which, according to the stands of the pro-Christian times, could be regarded as primitive, perverse and ever horrid, the basis of the religious practices as propounded by Atharvan and/or

Zarathustra was both popular and sound, barring, of course, the coarseness which in those remote times could not be faulted on grounds of our modern outlook about values of life.

The remote past looks always bizarre and coarse when judged in accordance with the refined standards of the post-Buddha and Christian times. The disposal of the final judgement on the Christ Himself, would appear today as nothing short of barbarous. But that is the way of all history. That is how civilization has grown through the years. We shall not pronounce judgement on the past by our present standards.

Think of the unmindful and horrendous treatment of heavily crowded towns like Nagasaki and Hiroshima in our times. But we have coolly condoned the barbarous destruction of millions of innocent lives by a handful of miscreants. We coolly contribute to the horrors of our times when our judgements are influenced by the powers of money, might and imperial swashbucklings.

The ideologies which are put forward in order to shield the inner nature of these dreadful acts do not hold good even for a decade; and the specialists of yesterday are proved to be misguided balderdash before the dusts and ashes of the disasters get settled.

Such modern political judgements would one day in history have to be re-judged as time passes, tyranny weakens, and memory mellows.

Judged by these historical standards the values of the Far and Middle East before the Christian and Egyptian eras had undergone a sea change by the time of the Iraq Khalifs, when a kind of peace prevailed over the hitherto disturbed land. And much of the profundity and peace of those changed times affected the spiritual thinkings in the Indian subcontinent.

This was the time when the thoughts and passions of the clean-minded Sufi Mystics had spread all over India; and by the time of the Pathan rulers of Delhi in the 15th and 16th centuries the genius of the religious receptivity and sensitivity of the devoted Indian minds had transformed into contemporary spiritual thoughts into a unique and genuine pious form.

We have seen before that this form was known as the Vaishnava mould, a new kind of emotional awakening which guided the hungering souls to the achievements of the final spiritual goal through a total ministration of Love. The ideals of Christianity did not play a little role in this transformation.

By the time of the Moghul Emperor Akbar the Great (16th cent.) the minstrels of the Bhakti movement had covered the length and breadth of the country. Great treatises like the *Shrimad Bhagavatam, Vishnu Puranam, Devi Bhagavatam, Narada Bhakti Sutram, Pancharatram*, etc., were contributed by well versed philosophers. Out of the growing enthusiasm great devotional passages and fables were interpolated in the two great Epics. In the Mahabharata we find such episodes as the *Sunat Sujaatiya* or the *Markandeya-Samvada* in the *Vana Parvam.*

This kind of patronage from highly placed scholars and philosophers was responsible for popularizing the cult of Bhakti, i.e., of love for the Divine. The way these learned devotees, the *Bhaktas*, enthusiastically took up the mission of Love, encouraged to a very great extent a genuine sentiment towards feeding the growing hunger achieving the Divine goal of attaining union with God. These Bhaktas practised renunciation of sensual pursuits, and practise of the Divine Love in every respect after setting for the inner Self only a single goal, viz. that of achieving the Fullness in Love.

Let us make no mistake here. Bhakti was not a sensuous programme. Bhakti did not indulge in, even in the remotest way, sensuous indulgence of any kind. Neither was it a programmed discipline for rigid and austere renunciation. No! Not at all.

In the path of Bhakti all senses have to be kept fully alert and alive; fully functional and sensitive. How could a devotee ever think of meeting his Beloved with maimed or sick responses? Divine Love must of necessity be healthy, whole, entire.

Love is the Ultimate in Health. Love is a sweeping gale driving through crevices of dark chambers filled with complexes, doubts, suspicions and ever growing greed. Love dies at the touch of the physical, the material. The legend of Psyche and Eros in Homer relates a case to the point.

Divine Love should be healthy; the Beloved should be healthy and the Lover too has to be healthy. No sick engagement is this. Love is health. True health is preserved by true Love. The sick of mind and body cannot love. *Naayamaatmaa Balaheenena Labhyah* (Upanishad).

This health is more than mere mundane. This health is ethereal. In picturing this spiritual health one is reminded of the fulfilling pictures of the broad fullness of the smiles of a suckling baby; and the total nudeness of a bathing child.

This kind of health and fullness is seen in an Himalayan orchard of almonds, walnuts and cherries in full blossom. The exuberance effusing out of such healthy Love responses actually would suggest a mental *tabula rasa* on which the world has not been able to record any random scratch, or thoughtless gypsy lines.

A healthily loving mind does not accept any kind of mindless wandering whims other than the positive totality of Love and Love alone.

This health denotes a satisfaction in renouncing all; giving away all; sacrificing all in the burning pile of flaming grandeur of intense Love.

Engaged and involved in such an exercise renunciation itself becomes ecstasy; sacrifice becomes fulfilment; loneliness becomes a heavenly musical solitude. No complexes to cloud the responses; no keep-backs to cover up creeping miserliness; no hide and seek to obstruct total exposure of body and mind (more mind than body) in the all enveloping arms of the beloved.

In this context recall the *Raasa Panchadhyaya* of the *Bhaagavatam*, or the ninth canto of Kalidasa's *Kumaara Sambhavam*; or *Laila and Majnun*; or *Shirin and Farhad*. Recall Habbaa Khatun and Lall Deed of Kashmir; or the eternal Meera of Rajasthan. Recall with humility and wonder that unknown Black girl of the Song of Songs, or St. Theresa of Avilla; St. Francis of Assisi; or St. Catherine of Germany.

There are hundreds who have sacrificed their mundane and physical life for experiencing the divine totality of the Love of the Divine; for realizing the Glory of the Lord.

What we are speaking of here is a total, final, and sublime feeling for the healthy in spirit, mind and body. The sick of mind has no place in this congress.

But in this sublime exercise the aim is not, and could never be, any kind of personal voluptuation, personal indulgence, personal gratification for gratification's sake.

In this kind of enjoyment the voluptuary keeps in view only one goal: that of fulfilling the wishes of God, as the Divine is realized within the heart.

The idea was based, more or less, on a philosophy of renouncing every other object in life for the sake of obtaining a final fulfilment of Love and Love alone, when the objective of that Love was nothing else but an Ultimate Union with the Divine.

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In Spiritual history such longing for the Ultimate Truth, the only Truth, has been found to have driven many a tender heart from the massive unchartered "area of nowhere" to programmed discipline for rigid and austere renunciation. No! Not at all.

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In Spiritual history such longing for the Ultimate Truth, the only Truth, has been found to have driven many a tender heart from the massive unchartered "area of nowhere" to the only-one many-splendoured Eternity and glorious Sublimity of a sure Region of Peaceful Ideal; from the darkening shadows of a strange area of surrounding doubts to a sure and trusted area of Ultimate Reliance and Final Abode of Trust, Peace and Ethereal Exhilaration.

Such an *Isle of Innisfree* exists there in the distant regions of the Spirit. Only we do not know where it is to be found. (Only the *Guru* is the guide.)

This is no mere thin poetry; this is a stern Reality. Let us face it. Face the challenge; own it; recognize it; and strive and strive and strive again, incessantly, for it. Let us not stop; let us not rest on our oars. Let us not turn to our cynical attitudinousness of the pseudo-wise, of the vain book-monger, of the wretched wisecrack to blow false lifeless dry winds on the green acres of inner vision and spiritual pastures. Such stray winds only devastate the green and abounding mental vistas with the barrenness and desolation of frustrated petulance.

Enter into a Sacred tryst with yourself; hold on to the inner Self, the only and truest Self; and strive, strive and strive repeatedly without the least feeling of frustration. Trust begets Love; and Love is God.

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Tulsidas the Poet of Total Love

As an illustration of the above theory of Divine Love as propounded so far, we treasure in the traditions of the Hindus of India many saintly names who, like bright constellations shining in the night sky, show a path to the lost mariners to Eternity. In India, as elsewhere, souls dedicated to the mission of searching for the Eternal Truth have been straddling the length and breadth of the country, as well as the Times down its history.

There are too many such names to be contained within an author's list. Some of these are known; yes; but quite a crowd remains unkown; for they subsist like the stars in heaven: some are known, but most are unknown.

Known or unknown, they are all there; silent; often even unrecognised; nonetheless, the innate aura and the resultant chained reactions of their projections, existence of their pursuits and spiritual glory continue to affect generations of lives living on this petty planet known as earth.

The stars are many in the sky; some known and measured; but most remain unmeasured, and unknown. But how does it matter? Known or unknown, they continue to bestow their blessings on the mortals who always deserve their radiated sympathies.

The Life Force owes its strength and verve to forces yet unknown and unfathomed. Known or unknown, the names of these spiritual rovers prove, for one thing, a man's unquenching quest for finding out the Ultimate Truth behind this mystery called life.

What it is for? What is its mission? Why was it at all brought about? Where from we come? Whither are we going? What is Life's destiny? Why this wide complex drama? To function and achieve what?

These questions, and many such random doubts, and naggingly insisting questions, twinkle through the gray mind at times when the mental and intellectual world seems to be asleep, and when the individual soul alone keeps vigil over the chimera of Life, and looks for an answer.

There must be an answer. In fact, there is an answer.

India has been lucky in this regard. Throughout her long and chequered history the mind of India has never been allowed to go limbo. Material prosperity has not been able to suffocate her spiritual enthusiasm, or throttle her enquiries in that regard. Periodical pitfalls and cataclysmic upheavals have not ever scared her mystics, the dedicated researchers in the realms of the spirit. The swords of the marauders, the guns of the aggrandisers, the shouts and dusts thrown up by brigands and greedy freebooters, the tyranny of the soulless, or the contumely of the arrogant never disturbed the Himalayan serenity, the majestic dignity of the Spirit of India engaged in a total absorption in unravelling the Mystery of the Life Process.

When the entire world had been rapaciously and single-mindedly engaged in the material hunt of the living process, in the loot called imperialism's progress, ancient mystic India remained unperturbed, undisturbed, serene and collected.

Groups of vandals and marauders attacked, and at times tore through her material entrails; but continuing to live distant and unperturbed India looked upon the changes as an ancient mariner looks upon waves after waves of the encroaching hungry sea dashing against the cliffs, leaving the grandeur of the living land mass quite unmoved.

This single-minded dedication to the sublimated research of the Life Process has given to the growth of Indian history an orb of grandeur of a different mint altogether. The currency issued from this mint has been exchanged at the gates of Paradise of human sympathy, personal Love, abnegated fullness of living, and other treasures of man's hunt for the spiritual serenity.

The history of that ethereal hunt for the spiritual strength in life is too long, and abiding. Like the rivers flowing from the snowy Himalayan peaks that tradition of spiritual hunt too has no beginning and no end. Tap the Indian history at any end, at any time, and scores of names of these spiritualists.

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There had been hundreds such. But here we extol the life of an humble village boy, a total reject of Man and society:

of an abandoned tragic infant who had been denied his natural right to the milk of his own mother; denied shelter and protection, even provision from his own father; and who, like the Oedipus of Homer was born to be abandoned immediately.

Poor Oedipus had lived to become a king; and our hero lived to become a King of kings, as the proud Creator of a New Age which abides in full force even today across a period of five hundred years.

We are going to handle the life story of this zero-valued personality, who in the course of history, as Father Time became older and saner, bedazzled and bewildered mankind with his peace and love-laden achievements secured through persuasions devoted to Love and Love alone.

At this distant period of time, when any name should in all probability have faded out into insignificance, even oblivion, the fame and achievements of this abandoned child amaze the scholars and the common man alike over the four continents. His name stands as a monument, as a lighthouse to those who look for guidance in the stormy sea of Life.

This man was Tulsidas, a poet of the highest calibre who has left for posterity an epic which has been sung in huts and palaces, markets and temples, by the rich and the poor, the learned and the rustic, and listened to avidly by millions over the ages irrespective of caste, creed, culture or education.

Rich and poor alike heartily treasure the mellifluous composition, and have been found only too willing to sing and listen to his sublime poetry which is woven around the popular legend of a prince of the historic and romantic kingdom of Ayodhya (modern Oudh in Uttar Pradesh in India).

The name of this adorable prince was Rama; and the great Sanskrit poet Valmiki had left a celebrated epic, one of the two national epics of the Indian subcontinent, the

RAMAYANA. It relates the wondrous life story of the Prince of Ayodhya. The epic written by Tulsidas had been woven around the tragic tale of Rama, son of King Dasharatha.

Out of sheer genius he decided to leave the Brahmanical language of Sanskrit alone, and took courage to pen the epic in the daring language of the streets and markets, of the common proletariat, namely, Hindi, which was the spoken language used throughout the best part of Northern India. In those days Sanskrit was the language of the educated and the highbrow community. Writing in the language of the rustics, specially by a learned Brahmin, was never even thought of; in fact, such an attempt on the part of a Brahmin was frowned upon.

But Tulsidas, the bold and the unique, decided upon this venture for the general good and upliftment of the majority of the population who had no access to the so-called 'reserved language of the Gods', as Sanskrit was claimed to be.

Fellow Brahmin friends, specially the comrades of his own school (*Pathshala*), tried earnestly to dissuade him from undertaking this mad venture.

But there was something in the grain of this orphaned and self-made young man which loved to take up an untrodden path, accept a daring challenge. His whole personal life had been one long record of rebellion and novel adventure. (By and by we shall come to learn of it.)

He knew that due to the Brahmanical misdirections his personal life was deprived of the natural affection of a mother and a father, due as a birthright to a new born.

He had been rendered helpless in accepting and following a lonely and demanding solitary journey through life, and scratched out a living as best as unaided he could do. His best assistance in that heartless predicament came from the simple village rustics, who themselves on their part were deprived of eduction, comfort, guidance, shelter and even respectable means of a surviving livelihood.

Under the circumstances his personal life was so much dependent on the simple charity of the poor rustics that in his later efforts for literary merits and service to God he could not abandon in the interest of those simple unlettered village folks. The personal liberalism of the nature of Tulsidas overcame his pride of being born to vain Brahmanical traditions.

In his inspired poetic mind these folks lived as sources of living inspiration and soul throbbing gratitude. He would not abandon them. They in the days of his dire distress had stood by him; now, in his turn he would dedicate for their soul's benefit his life work, which, under the circumstances, was the least he could have done for them.

He would never abandon them. Instead he decided to abandon Sanskrit as a medium of literary expression for good, and determined to stick to the sonorous and simple langugage of the brotherly rustics.

After abandonment by parents and society he had lived too long amongst them, speaking the same language, gloating in the same idiom and picturing life with the same images. The rustic and he existed in the same wavelength he believed. He had great faith in their simplicity and honesty (as his hero Rama had great faith in the wild and non-Aryan tribes of the forest).

He sincerely entertained a great faith in the simplicity and directness of the village folks; in their loyalties; in their bounding sympathy and dedication. He would not abandon them, or their language, taking them to be unclassed human beings.

So much love and sympathy could not have gone unrequited. He laid complete faith in the multitude, and decided to write his lifework in the language of the vast world of the village folks.

Besides, the subject itself tempted him.

An only child, and on top of that first and most likely the only son, he was mercilessly abandoned even at a suckling age. When he came to the world, he came wailing; and he lived wailing until he found his hero Rama, and until he could dedicate himself, his talents, his meditations, prayers and skills to the creation of his hero *as he imagined him to be.*

As a reflection of his inner thoughts an intimate symapthy with, and heartfelt sweet understanding of, the human minds breathed into the fabric of the new epic he planned, although it was based on an earlier tale told about a noble Prince. It was a life of adventure, challenge and vigour, and its narration fascinated him.

The aura and grandeur of the glory and nobility of that composition had covered the entire subcontinent, because of the simple language he had chosen. So that, even across the centuries, that epic written in a daring rustic, unorthodox language has become a source of permanent solace and sustenance for the millions. They are singing the song currently; they had been singing it in the past; and it could be believed that people would be singing it as long as language and human craving for elevated tales would survive.

The original Ramayana's popularity was not only due to its literary merits. Its popularity was based on its human character. The tragedy of Rama, and the subsequent harassment of his only wife (a very rare thing in those days) Sita, as well as the loyalties of his brothers Lakshmana, particularly of Bharata, brought the tale to the hearts of the multitude. It carved out a permanent niche in the treasured area of human sympathy and animal love. Even the anti-characters of this great epic are covered with great qualities of valour, justice, affection and love.

It was Valmiki, the original composer of a great epic, who, inspired by the sage Narada, had decided to narrate that story in full-blooded detail of form, emotions, values and grandeur of style, language and prosody.

A few centuries later, when the *Mahabharata* was being written, it was thought pragmatic to include the tragic story of Rama even there (*the Vanaparva*, i.e., the third canto). This proves the attractiveness of the character of Rama around whom the story of Valmiki as well as of Tulsidas is woven.

Ever since, the same story has been told and retold by many in many of the languages of India. Even the Jatakas of the Buddha refer to it. Valmiki had treated the subject with full flourish.

It is an added proof of the eternal attractiveness of the story that it was borrowed and retold in many of the foreign languages all over the old world; and there is no language in India in which the story has not received its due honour in their own versions.

But all that was Brahmanical. The language used was the reserve of only one section of the people. By and large, the majority had no recourse whatsoever to a taste of the story through their own efforts until Tulsi came, and dared.

It was through the revolutionary efforts of Tulsidas that the story, written in Sanskrit, hitherto a special reserve of the Brahmins and Brahmins alone to narrate, was daringly opened by the efforts of a meek village orphan.

The unmarked boy jumped at the audacity of narrating the holy tale in a rustic medium. And this made it possible for the hitherto neglected mass to directly dive into and share the pleasures of the noble legend without any rigid institutional intervention, or obstruction.

The great tale of Rama was opened up in the celebrated *Ramcharit-Manasa* (or simply in the *Manasa*) written in rustic Hindi as spoken by the mass.

The greatness of Tulsidas as a poet, as well as a person, rests, thus, in this epoch-making adventure into the special preserves of the Brahmanical world, and making 'the holy' *Ramayana* popularly available to the entire community. Ironically today the same holy Brahmins are found to be the most ardent advocates of the popular Hindi *Khariboli* (mass language) composition, *Ramcharita-Manasa*.

The story of Rama has proved to be so fascinating that it has also been told by the later poet Vyasa, in his celebrated epic the *Mahabharata*. There the history of Rama was told in short relevant details alone.

But the fact that Vyasa used the same story, already narrated by an earlier poet Valmiki, shows the tempting popularity of the attractive and fascinating epic tale. Rama has always remained popular with the masses, like the Buddha, or Jesus.

Yet such was the attraction of the strength of the character of the noble prince that millenniums after, the same story had been related in a 'mean' un-Brahmanical provincial tongue by the great soul, Tulsidas, and which ever since has remained the most popular poem sung in India by the millions.

In fact, there is no Indian language of merit in which the same Rama legend (*Rama-Katha) has* not been narrated. Indeed there has not been any Indian writer of merit, particularly poet, who has not tried his hand on episodes or legends contained in eternal RAMAYANA of VAALMIKI.

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We have not yet explained why the suckling infant Tulsi was abandoned by his parents just after his birth. This calamity, a catastrophic calamity, was hinged on the date and moment of his birth. Yet the irony is that we do not know with certainty the exact date of birth of this epoch-making poet. There is no clear record whatsoever of his date of birth.

This is almost a common feature regarding historical details in Indian history. Neglect of the so-called mundane details of life and living has been a sad feature of Indian records. May be this was due to the naturally nursed Hindu philosophical abnegation of the so-called realities of Life, which has always been highlighted in the Upanishads as a flitting chimera.

Unless this kind of neglect for the material facts is referred to the ingrained negative philosophical attitude of the Hindu psyche it is difficult to explain such cynical perspectives of life in a people so careful about analysing the metaphysical.

A nation so particular about reading the movements of the constellations of the stars and of the tides and ocean movements, of the thousands of herbs and details of. architecture, hydraulics and cosmology, of almanacs, lexicology, grammar and rhetoric, lamentably shying about recording exact dates of events cannot easily be explained, particularly when its neighbour China, and the Chinese record are found to be so careful about details of events and dates.

As a result, the date of birth of this epoch-making poet, Tulsidas, cannot be determined with an amount of certainty. All that we know, and we know so little and so fragile, is called strenuously from inferences scattered here and there in his works.

There are books like *Manasamayanka* and *Mula Gosaincharit* in which we do find a date (1493). Unfortunately mathematical calculations find the date to be incorrect. This rigid mathematical certainty comes out of the very reason why the infant was thrown away at birth. We shall discuss that later.

But another date has been suggested by a couplet in *Rama-Muktaavali*, written by Tulsidas. This should be 1503. But this date too fails to answer the demands of the mathematical calculations based on the constellation of stars under which he was born.

This constellation of the stars was called *Moolaa*, a very challenging and inhospitable setting, specially under a yet sinister barrier, which gives it the ominous title of *Abhukta Moolaa*. Infants born under this star are certain to destroy all persons belonging to their own blood, and destroy even the bare plinth of the abode where they would be entertained.

Naturally it was found advisable to throw the infant to his fate; and he was indeed thrown away. How he survived, who dared to touch and adopt him, is not known. The villagers in India say, "Perhaps Rama did." Are they incorrect? Could Love be incorrect?

But some facts could be culled from his own writings. One of these facts says that he was born in the Avimukta Kshetra, Kashi (Varanasi), although other circumstantial details point out that he was born in a village Rajapur in the Soron (Saran) district of Hajipur, now in Bihar.

He developed into a bright looking young man, whose food and shelter were provided by some Gurus in Varanasi, who appreciated his talents, and nursed him under their scholastic wings.

We could imagine from these hard facts that some unknown kind hearts (God's hand?) found it hard to cast away a suckling baby, and like the legendary leopard of Rome took care of him in a way. Because he lived, so there necessarily had to be kind patrons; Tulsi called it Rama's hand. And this could have been the truth indeed.

Indeed he actually seems to have been brought up as flotsam and jetsam of Life's mystery-moulded dark sinister currents until he was rescued by some scholars in Varanasi where actually he found nourishment both for the body and the brain. His soul was satiated. He thought that here in the abode of Shiva, the Casteless, at last he had found his real place of a new birth.

Tulsi always 'regarded' Varanasi to be his 'birthplace', though Rajapur in the district of Soron claims to be his physical place of birth. Tulsi himself regarded that he was indeed 'born' in the Shiva-Abode of Varanasi. He had roamed over many places, and loved Chitrakoot; but Varanasi remained for him his birthplace, where his soul experienced a 'New Birth'.

No, his Brahmanical descent had not been forgotten; and he seems to have enjoyed a more or less privileged treatment specially reserved for a Brahmin child with a scholastic mould, and a perceptively brilliant future. Varanasi, and its educational system was nourishing for his development.

He utilized the privilege to his best advantage, and proved himself to be a diligent scholar, with admirable tendencies, so that as he grew, he was noted as a rare talent. For the first time he tasted respect.

He must have derived this respect, and also a regardful consideration, for the common unclassed mass from such beginnings of his life where he learned to have an equally full regard for the fallen crumbs of life as much as for the feast that life calls.

His natural aptitude for intellectual awareness had gathered much elevating and eye-opening experience from his greening years at the ancient Shaivaite Varanasi.

The philosophy of equality of social regard was imbedded in him because of the peculiar circumstances of his developing years in life through the murky confusion of neglect, poverty and abject dependence on the charity of the unknown. He suffered indignities, but he did not allow the sad moments of humiliation to get the better of him.

In order to express his predicaments in his writings he needed a parallel in history, so that he could find some justification for his own predicaments of life.

He had been searching for a hero from the epics who could agreeably fulfil his ambitious but searching philosophical outlook on life, and extol the fallen, provide for the deprived and regard the classless as equals in all respects.

In his search for such an unconventional hero he found the harassed and beleaguered Rama, the Prince of Ayodhya, abandoned by his own father, and forced to be abandoned by all his immediate relatives for no fault of his own.

Rama, the Prince of Ayodhya, and his story in the Ramayana grew roots into his character, as of the same texture of his blood and marrow, of the same vibrations as his own heartbeats; and suddenly he found himself in the same wavelength with the tragic Prince of the noble dynasty of the *Ikshvaku-s*.

He came to realize that the adoration of Rama was not really his discovery. The memory of the incarcerations of that hapless young man had inspired many of the previous poets to sing of him. So great and sublime was the popular range of admiration for his chosen hero that he at once decided to regard him as his God, and write about him an inspired poem in the epic form.

In this there seemed to be an obstruction, however.

Tulsi was consecrated and baptized, as a scholar living in Varanasi, the Shiva-land, in the fold of Shiva; and as such he was a Shaivic adorer of the Bhairava slogan of "All for One and the One for All". As a firm Shaiva (Shiva adorer) he could not have discriminated between man and man, which as a Brahmin lad he was expected to fall in with. Discrimination was an expression of Aryan pride. The Aryans regarded themselves as 'exclusive'. Shiva was the 'arch-Democrat'.

Brahmanism and Shaivism stood thus on different grounds, different grades; and the Brahmins of Varanasi did not look upon the growing scholar with much indulgence. They believed in their corrupt interpretation of the caste order, particularly of untouchability, as well as of the non-Vedic discarded communities known differently as the Ganas and the Kapis; and they, deluded diehards, strictly believed in privileges and profits attached to the popular Brahmanical order alone. Brahmanism in Varanasi was supreme in all social respects.

Tulsi's stance of equality, as Shiva would practise, even against the practices of such diehards as Daksha Prajapati, his father-in-law, irritated and infuriated the Brahmanical section of Varanasi, who continued to inflict horrendous tortures to the young dedicated, but the non-conformist scholar. He was subject to physical torments, and he had to seek shelter in woods near Varanasi.

Pressed thus by the surrounding oppositions he was compelled to look for a suitable prototype hero for his literary adventure, so that he could sing of him with full throated ease.

Eventually he found his mind's hero to be no other than Rama who had befriended the non-Aryan Kapis, the non-Brahmins, the folks living quite outside the Vedic system. Rama actually eulogized them; extolled their friendliness, prowess and absolute loyalty.

In the Uttara-kanda of the Ramayana by Valmiki Rama makes a significant statement to the Rishi Astavakra that great as people would call him for subduing the Raksha-s of Lanka, he actually could achieve the feat only with the assistance of the great Kapi-s, with Hanuman and Sugriva at their head.

(Did Rama by making that statement suggest that the entire country south of the Vindhyas could have been Aryanized long before if the proud Aryans had come to equal terms with the great non-Aryan cultures of the South, and befriended them as equals, if not more than equals?)

He had lived and dined with the people who had no place in the Vedic system; and his love for sundry and all lifted his stature to the status of a human God moving amongst the lesser and common humans.

Young Tulsidas firmly decided to sing of him, Rama, the Prince of Ayodhya, and the friend of the fallen and derided; and the *Valmiki-Ramayana* was reborn as the great Hindi epic *Ramcharita-Manasa*.

We know that Valmiki had already written an immortal epic, the Ramayana. Certainly his version of the same tale would in all its emphasis and detail be quite different. It is different. It is in all respects an 'original' work, but for the skeletal plot around which the Rama legend moves.

The scholars, the Brahmins particularly, would not tolerate such a sacrilegious exercise. They opposed singly, as well as in a team. He must have been scared; but his heroic heart, strengthened by his faith and devotion to the Rama-ideation and image, stuck to his resolve; and he continued in his determination of singing of the exploits of the great Rama, the harassed and the beleaguered Kshatriya Prince of Ayodhya.

Naturally he was careful enough not to call his composition as yet another *Ramayana;* instead, he decided to call his entirely original composition *Ramcharita-Manasa,* the character of Rama as He is revealed to my mind. *Ramcharita-Manasa* was born.

And as a corollary he also decided to write the book in a language which could be as near to the people about whom and for whom he wrote the new book, an *a la mode* epic in full cry. He wanted to stick to, by this means, to the people who had sustained him, and did not allow him to perish without shelter or succour.

In his language, and emphasis on character delineation he kept as close to them as possible. (We could read the details of the Yamuna boatman episode while going to Chitrakoota, as an example).

He rejected the stylish highbrow aristocratic Sanskrit, and wrote in the current spoken language of the Doab, Magadhi, or KHARI BOLI, the language of his beloved proletariat.

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Like his date of birth even the details of his life are merged in half speculation and half heresy, more of heresy.

And as the nature of heresys go, the life is part coloured with romanticism and part in idolization.

The crux of the case is that for Tulsidas, as for Valmiki, or Vyasa, or even the great Kalidasa, there exists no reliable record to determine the actual course of his life. Is this not also the fate of the supreme Homer? And, partly speaking, even of Shakespeare?

It is indeed an unfortunate situation; but we have to live with it, and build up, as we may, the life story of our Tulsidas, the creator of the great work *Ramacharita-Manasa*.

In accordance with the current customs of the times young Tulsidas eventually found a wife for himself to play with, but the play itself had succeeded in carrying away his otherwise mendicant floating mind to another plateau of rediscovered joy and exhilaration.

The marriage let him along a new stream of life, and soon he found that he could hardly do without the newly obtained charming total companionship. He loved his wife, and was totally dedicated to that love.

In the common world of mundane humanity few, if at all any, care about the tone and texture of Love as Love should be known and cultivated. We take a wife as a sex doll, and at times as a pot for churning out children, and little more.

In the common world, dominated by men, we hardly look forward to having a wife as a companion for the progress of life on equal footing. In the common life, a wife, Hindu or non-Hindu, used to play a subservient role rather than a role of companionship. This was not what the wife of Tulsidas had in her mind as her ideal of womanhood, and specially wifehood.

To her Love meant something different, and something more substantial, sturdy and solid. Love was not, and could not have been, to her a mere chimera, or a fancy flight into the regions of passion and sensuousness. Love in order to be meaningful must carry, she thought, some more substance, and at that, some very significant spiritual substance.

Love to be true must be, she thought, more of a sacrificing and befriending nature, more of substance and authority than mere submission as a meek and docile passive partner, more than a mere dumb servant. Love to her meant dignity, divination, dedication and self-control.

In a world where we, the common dross, continue to survive and surface, taking the business of living as a source of safety and security, we take Love as an expression of libido, a fulfilment of desire and possession.

Foolishly enough we cling to such romantic inanities. Hardly do we consider that what we call Life and Living spans an insignificant period in the succeeding series of events and chained reactions, which involve the supreme and sublime cycles of a Cosmic play of bringing Life into Being, and then whisking it away.

Life is indeed a stage; and on this stage the actors appear and disappear in strict accordance with the directions of the unseen and unfathomed forces which actually conduct the events as these have to be conducted.

From his birth Tulsidas had faced so many vicissitudes that knowingly or unknowingly he had developed within himself a firm faith that we the manikins could hardly force our future. We are essentially conducted and directed by a certain unalterable Source and Principle, a final Power. We have no knowledge about the Source and Way of that Power. It follows its own principles and methods; but the study of the process and methodology of that Power and its system of operation lies beyond our perception and ken.

Behind this dramatic process of perpetual coming in and going out, so Tulsidas was made to think, there existed only one great Truth: and that Truth was Love.

He owed this invaluable sublime realization to his young wife, who, young as she was, was reprimanding him. Through her intervention he had come to realize the Truth that impersonal unattached Love was an unerring expression of that Cosmic Power which brings the entire humanity and living world together. And once an individual could perceive that, what he attempts to cling to as his own is nothing at all compared to what lies beyond the immediate circle of his experience.

To hold on to something as one's own, even at that early age, he considered to be foolish. For him Love itself became a binding force, because it was his love for his wife that had brought to him this great Truth.

The intensity and brilliance of that love he could realize for the first time, because he had come too close to his newly married wife. It was she who had brought to him that new experience; the new realization.

He had covered her with all that Love, the love of owning and having a dear object of Love only for himself, when in the whole world, so far, he could not have claimed over anything as his own. His wife had opened up for him a completely new world which had hitherto been closed to him. Love took a new dimension; Love gained a new perspective.

On the person of his bride, wife, friend, he, for the first time, could lay claim on something as absolutely and entirely HIS. There was a reason. For the first time in his life he could hold on to someone as 'his own'. The feeling was so precious to him. He loved his Love and his Love-life with an intensity expected in inspired ecstasy.

But we are all mundane. We are small fries before such sublimity and intensity. The wife, poor girl of fewer years than the boy Tulsidas, could not bear that emotional upsurge, and she, poor thing, totally misunderstood his effusion as sheer lawless and uncontrolled sex hunger.

Then happened an incident; one of those momentous, but epoch-making chance incidents that turn the course of history.

It was a rainy day, and Ratnavali, Tulsi's wife, was not near him. She had gone to her parental village for quite a long time, in connection with a family wedding; and Tulsi found it too lonely at his home to stay alone. He decided to go to the distant village and join his wife, although he was not expected, nor invited. This was not expected in form from a son-in-law.

As he reached, he exposed himself to a lot of jokes and banters regarding his impatience at the absence of his young wife.

This embarrassed poor Ratnavali; and she blamed Tulsi for lack of restraint on his part.

When at night they were alone in the bed, instead of showing any ethusiasm as a woman for meeting her husband after a long time, she rebuked him for his lack of restraint, lack of manners, and pointed out to him the childishness that he had exposed himself to, and to which his poor wife Ratnavali too had got involved, so that all and sundry in the village were laughing at the "uninvited guest's presence" drawn by the charms and fascinations of a young wife. Ratnavali had reason to get sorely vexed.

She felt her predicament and embarrassment so keenly that finally she pointed out to him that his role of an anointed Gosaine (a God-loving soul) was reduced to a mockery by his total and shameless disregard of social form and personal restraint.

"Tell me dear", she said, "you call yourself a holy Gosaine; and for the temptation of reaching a mere wife, just a wisp of a female in a distant village on a rain splashed day you forgot all forms, and rushed to what? To just a woman's embraces? To a mere crude bundle of flesh? Consider deeply my man. Was that a worthwhile pursuit to be proud of?"

"O my poor husband! Had you, instead, rushed to God with half of this enthusiasm, perhaps you would have done yourself and the world a far greater favour."

"Love is a rare gift", she continued in a choked voice, "a God given gift to Man. If this Love were utilized and focused to the Supreme, not to the petty human love, a temporary love, if instead it was diverted to the Divine Love of God, perhaps, the very heavens would have been your share."

"God is kind", she continued, "as I know God to be; and He is looking for such sincere and intense Love. He has everything. Only one thing He seeks. That precious thing He seeks is pure Love. He has not got enough of it, although He alone is its Source. The Ocean has enough water; yet my dear husband, the ocean looks eagerly forward to the drops that the sky pours on it, and the earth seeks it with eagerness."

"Very much in the same manner God, the fund of all Love, still looks forward to having Love from the beings He has created."

"This give and take, this kind of reciprocation is His ultimate share from all that He has created Himself. This is the eternal Game. He in His playfulness sports about; and we have to respond to it in every way. This creates a bridge between God and man. Love is the only bridge that carries man to God."

"Why then, my poor husband, deny Him this trusted gift? Must you not return Love to Him who has gifted you with that rare treasure—Love?"

"Why waste that gift on a poor individual like me? Offer it to Him; to Him who has enriched you with it. Would it not have been much more profitable to receive in its exchange the Divine Love of God?"

"Oh my dear Gosaine, do take a stock of yourself; collect your higher senses; and think of the Love of God more than the mere flesh love for a woman. Do not please neglect Eternity in false favour of the temporary."

The long but sensitive harangue proved to be an effective dressing for the excited youth. It succeeded in toning the young man's nerves, and elevating him to a plane much higher than what he had been accustomed to experience so far.

He started thinking in depth. The words penetrated through his dizzy and confused Self. He was, as if suddenly, awakened from a deep drunken slumber.

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Confused, poor Tulsidas pulled himself together. A self-analysing search had started working within the dark recesses of his personal chequered life. He was indeed reprimanded. But the reprimand was both essential and timely. Moreover, it was delivered by one whom he considered in this world to be the nearest and dearest to him.

Her words sizzled his tender conscience. The words were too sharp; and they cut deep into his consciousness. He was shaken up. His tender loving nature received a shock. All his dreams and ideas broke down into pieces like a palace devastated by a rude earthquake.

Something awoke and stood up from a deep sleep in the innermost heart of the young man. He received as it were a new drink for a New Life, and stood resolved to embrace that new life.

This time when he left her, and slipped out of that uncharitable village community, he knew that he was leaving her for good, and leaving his past behind, never to look back again. He was out for going along a way quite different from what he had been accustomed to follow so far.

He took to the path of the homeless *Vairagees*, of the *Darvishes*, of the thousands of God-fearing, God-searching souls who leave all attachments behind, and take to the dusts of a never ending sojourn to the realms of Nowhere, to the charmed *Isle of Innisfree.*

He had heard from a number of people that a new form of mendicants had hit the dusts of the sacred land of India. They had come from the far away regions in the west, and they sang and danced in the name of a beloved God. They were called *Darvishes,* and they came from the Islamic zones of Mesopotamia, Iraq and Persia.

They were called the sufi-s (the clean ones), and they sang of God and believed in nothing except in the Love they bore to that loving God, as well as to the Creation of God. That God was a friend, a companion and a sharer in the soothing drinks of life. He was an emblem of joyous companionship, of friendliness and co-sharing in the hearty drinks served in the Caravansarai of Life and Death.

He also came to know that the chiefs of the land, inclusive of the Emperors in Delhi, had found the way to the joyous inn where the Drink of Life is served from the pitcher of Love; and the companions around, all equally drunk, partake of that same immortal drink of great spiritual solace and appeal. They formed a club of joy where spiritual ecstasy could be experienced in the name of God.

He set out in search of these mendicants, the Intoxicated Ones of the Divine Caravansarai. Of these mendicants and their ways we have to learn much more than the mere shell. We continue with Tulsi's life sojourn.

Tulsidas left his home life far behind, and was looking for a Guru who could initiate him to a new life.

The long and arduous search began. The spiritual air of India during these times had been charged with a new movement quite unknown to the land of the Vedas. Between the years 1000 and 1700 the spiritual climate of India was severely shaken by a mild loving approach to the divine, which was quite contrary to the attitude of the conquering hordes of the Pathans of Afghanistan and the Mughals of

Farghana in Russian Turkistan. Nay, even from the very distant Vedic engulfment of fire, havi, Ashwamedh, Vaajapeya, Raajasuya, etc.

The new spiritual movement bore no trace of the malice, hatred, belligerency and keenness of the marauding converting Islamic zealots. On the contrary, it preached a message of God-Love which made God and Man unite in the same level merged in an ocean of Love and Love alone.

After the Vedas and Quran that new deal was a unique novel idea. People harassed by violence and compulsions, humiliations and bereavements hung on to the novel idea of Love for Man and God as avidly as a thirsty man in a desert would run for a cup of water.

The message of this love cut easily through the many restrictions and contradictions which had so far prevented two great cultures to come together and create a new peaceful area of coexistence, a new society of God-Love, a universal community based on Divine Love.

Where violence had failed, this message of Peace dominated the hearts of the multitude.

The new wave had come from the distant lands of the Tigris—Mesopotamia, Iraq and particularly Baghdad and Iran, and was known as the movement of the Sufi-s—a sect dedicated to God-Love, which appealed to all human beings to get merged into the Ocean of Love to God through practising Love in the human world.

Love and Peace alone, they believed, acted as the only reliable bridge and could lead the human soul from the purgatory of desire and selfishness to the elysium of liberation of the soul.

That liberation would come, so they believed, from merging the individual soul (*Jeevatman*) into the Cosmic Soul (*Paramatman*), of which the individual was only a poor part.

The two are indeed one, they claim, as the flower and its fragrance are one. One could not be thought of without the other. It was like music and its melody; the body and the love residing in the body; the mind and its moods, the moon and its light.

Man was tied to God through the fragrance of Love and Love alone. The individual, they thought and preached, was less than a drop lifted from the Cosmic Ocean, and was destined to merge ultimately into the same Cosmos.

Therefore it behoved the individual to lead a life clean, clear and simple, white and unspotted, unscarred and unblemished, like a *tabula rasa* so that the same heart could be offered as a handful of fresh jasmine flower to the pleasure of God.

God was the final goal. From Him we come; and to Him we are destined to go. The more we love, and love unselfishly, that broad and sure route of going back to the source of all Love becomes easier and smoother.

It was a clean path of total dedication, and an entirely new path never before illustrated on the Indian soil so emphatically, and with so much urgency. It propounded on the Realised Belief and Faith on the final Power of Divine assimilation with the only Source from where we all come.

The most famous advocates of this Faith, the Sufi faith, were the great mystic poets in Persia, Arabia, and India: Rumi, Al Hajaj, Al Baruni, Omar Khayyam, Hafiz, Amir Khusru, Saadi, Baba Farid, Kabir, etc. The influence of that poetry, its sheer beauty, and the subtle truth it contained and advocated was too precious and captivating to be ignored.

The aroma of the poetry affected some of the leading Pathan Emperors of Delhi. And a host of Sufi saints, as they were called, made their permanent home in India. The abodes of *Nizamuddin Aulia, Salim Chisti, Moinuddin Chisti, Billa Shah, Hamadani, Lal Deed* and *Habba Khatun* and a host of others throughout the vast land became the focal point for all God lovers to assemble as they do even today.

The influence of this message of Love was direct and immediate. The simple status of uniting with the Godhead was too tempting, and fully rewarding. The simplicity of the discipline of this devotion affected the rank and file in India. The imperial courts as well as the market assemblies and dusty road trotters fell for this path. If not for any other attraction the sheer beauty of its poetry and music supplied enough incentive to make it a popular religion.

Music attracts and binds; and the great and sublime Sufi music bound in one tie all and sundry in India in one single tie of Divine Love known as Bhakti.

A host of God-lovers surged forth one after another between the momentous years of 1137 and 1650. From Ramanuja in the Tamil Nadu (1137) to Dadu 1603 (when Emperor Akbar was on the throne) a series of saints appeared to lead India to a new horizon. It was Bhakti. They were all saturated with the Sufi approach to the Divine. Bhakti became a common meeting ground for Hindus and Muslims. The songs of Kabir and Meera were sung everywhere.

They belonged to what they called the *Pushti Marga,* the way of the "Fulfilled". It was called by that name because it lead the way to Divine Union through a practice of *pleasures of life,* as life itself was supposed to be a Gift from God; and to allow that Life to enjoy neatly and in an orderly way was the highest offer that could be made to the Only and the Original Godhead. Divine Love and complete dedication were the two pillars of this philosophy of fulfilment.

He began to search for one of these Divinely merged souls, who could have shown Tulsi the right way. The search was long and extremely strenous. He went from pilgrimage to pilgrimage, and left no stone unturned, even though his health was failing him. Even the common men of the markets and the streets began to pity him, and looking at his miserable condition stretched their hands to assist him. But his search for the real Path-finder did not yet end.

Eventually he found one such divinely blessed person after a long lone vigil in the person of the famous *Guru Ramananda,* a renowned spiritual man, who had done a great deal in introducing the faith of Love, of a casteless society of Love. The way was unorthodox, anti-vedic; but that was the way of the *Vaishnavas* and the *Sufi-s.* He had heard of Rumi, Al Hajaj, Al Baruni, Nizamuddin, and of the great Hamadani. He had heard of Ramananda, Ramdas, Kabir and Chaitanya.

And with that kind of inspiration and confidence nestling within his deeper and lonely soul he went to Varanasi and got engaged in a very long period of abject penance. And there in Varanasi, on the banks of the holy soul-filling Ganges at Asi, he finally realized that for him Rama and Rama alone would be an ideal of life. His identity with Rama was complete and total. He felt that inside and out he was all Rama's, and Rama became all to him.

There and then he decided to carve out a new look musical chronicle expanding over the life of Shree Ramachandra, Prince of Ayodhya, who, like him, for no fault of his own had undergone so much harassment in life, but who never forgot his duty and principles.

The epic tale would follow the layout of the tragic episodes of his personal life as well as the layout of the sonorous poem, the famous epic, the *Ramayana of Valmiki*; but in content, spirit and literary layout *Ramacharita-Manasa,* as he called his work, would be a unique product meant for the use of the common folks who would sing it in markets, villages, by the banks of rivers, as in temples without much ado and Brahmanical interventions, or restrictions. *Ramcharita-Manasa* would then have become a daily and nightly companion of the common folks, who had no approach to the serious Shastras in Sanskrit, over which only the Brahmanas had their monopoly. He would write a non-Brahmanical Ramayana for the non-Brahmanical masses.

Rama it was who in the name of justice and fairplay fraternized with all and sundry as his brothers and equals, forgetting the snobberies and restrictions of caste-bars and Vedic barriers. Rama as he saw him became his ideal, his idol; and talking of him and him alone became a Divine magnificent obsession with him.

He decided after a long and deep consideration to write a new book about how Rama lifted himself from his miseries, and lived and died as a beacon light for all Spiritual Navigators. The resolve to write the *Ramcharita-Manasa* was born.

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Yes, born it was; but in executing the will into reality and achievement there stood several difficulties; difficulties which the simple minded Tulsi had not ever thought of.

Tulsidas was accused of many insults to the Brahmins in general, and to the holy *Ramayana of Valmiki* in particular. A confrontation was thus allowed to face him as a challenge. He was accused of writing in rustic non-Brahmanical language, which was in itself a sacrilege. To sing of God in any language other than God's own language, Sanskrit, was viewed as a deliberate violation of a heaven-granted holy privilege.

No Brahmin could bear this deliberate insult to their ranks. Furthermore in the narrative side by side with the eulogies showered on the gods and the holy Rishis the lives and doings of the non-Aryan chiefs had been limelighted. Anusuyaa and Mandodari, Bharadwaja and Shavari, Vashishtha and Hanumanta, or Bharata and Sugriva made no difference in his work. That was transgression into an honoured system, so they thought.

That was unbearable; uncondonable. The way this upstart Brahmin youth had been dealing with the character, acts and status particularly of one of the non-Aryan apes, Hanuman, to whom as they heard about it, Tulsidas paid floral homage every day, was a calculated and deliberate insult to the glories of Brahmanism, as they viewed it.

They conferred with him on the impropriety of such a treatment given to an ape with the hope of bringing him back to the Brahmanical fold. But determined as he was, resolved and sure, he found little interest in their 'shop' talk; and indirectly told them that he was determined to follow the path which Rama Himself had directed him to follow.

He was found in no mood to listen to any human advice, which went contrary to his principle of Universal Love. He and his resolve, he said, was in Rama's hands. The change would come when Rama would direct him to change. He was in His hands; and no human counsel could change what Rama Himself had ordained.

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Where from did Tulsidas derive this mammoth courage? Against so much organized opposition and dire threats what made him stand resolutely firm and erect?

One has to go deep into his antecedents, and to his formative years in search of true secret of this stern determination, this dour and heroic stand against the conventions, the hotchpotch of a ritually shackled society. He wanted to stand for sheer truth and truth alone.

As an individual Tulsi was sincerely and totally a man of love. The penury and meekness of his growing years, and the considerations he had received when in those lean conditions, from quite unknown hands, made him convinced that the area of Love and Affection, of the spirit of fellow feeling and human sympathy did not bid any scriptural restrictions.

The quality of human love is as natural as the air we breathe, and the moon that shines and pours a soft touch on tired limbs. He was convinced through the ups and downs of his own life that man's love for man is as natural a process as the mountain rains tumbling down to the valleys, and bestowing prosperity to the wealth that good crops bring.

The progress of his own life drama had taught him no theoretical book lesson, no dry hypothetical knowledge, but a vivid and firm practical lesson. He realized that the flow of love and consideration which binds heart to heart is God's own gift, without which Life could not have survived all the challenges that it has to confront.

Life's progress does not enjoy a smooth run. Life has to meet cruel oppositions. The factors that work against Life are as strong and persistent as Life's natural will to survive and live. Existence is an achievement gained through paying a price in the golden tokens of Love, Sympathy, Consideration and making room for others. Modesty and natural charity help build a bridge that spans the Known and the Unknown.

Through bitter experience he had learnt that he could not have forgotten the personal and practical lessons he had learnt from Life. Man was his friend and family; Life was his God-granted bequest; a manly Will and wise perception formed properties on which he could lay claim. No fear from man could deprive him from such patrimony.

He respected Love, *Prem*, as he was accustomed to call it. He respected its utility as well as its influence in a Man's Life. Love or *Prem* was a vital force to reckon with. Without the panacea of Love, Life's journey would not only be arduous, hazardous—but indeed impossible. Love acted as the life-giving drink of water, which we receive as a gift from Nature.

Through continuous adversity he had learnt some bitter and indelible lessons. The most important lesson that had stood out of all the bygone turmoils was what he had learnt as the message of Love from Life.

His respect for this Love was regarded by him to be as holy and precious as for any other holy experience. He could never forget his indebtedness to the hospitality, both subjective and objective, he had received from the many known and unknown institutions of Kashi.

Unknown families, and even the open street urchins of Kashi-Varanasi were as kindly and sympathetically disposed towards him as the highly learned inhabitants and spiritual personalities of that unique Shiva township.

He had heard that Shiva himself had lovingly carved out that part of the earth for the comforts of Parvati. The scriptures (especially the *Kashi-Khandam* of the *Skanda Puranam*) speak loudly and eloquently of the virtues of Varanasi.

He grew to love Kashi-Varanasi, Shiva-Parvati, the Ganga and particularly an open and simple way of the people of Varanasi. The pleasant and gay abandon of the mind of the people of Kashi, that divine disregard for forms and etiquette, that natural bent of mind to be brotherly to the next fellow-being as found in the city of Varanasi had made a deep dent into the make-up of the character of the houseless abandoned Tulsidas.

He found Shiva, and the concept off the Shaivic philosophy, so very close to his personal mental make-up that he admired and accepted Shiva as his spiritual Guru and deity of the soul. His chosen path to Saadhana was Shiv-Saadhana.

He of course had chosen to write of the incarcerations of the Prince of Ayodhya, but indeed emotionally as well as spiritually, he was nothing but a *Shiva Sadhaka* of Varanasi. He considered himself to be nothing else but a creature of the Lord, and a humble servant of *Shiva Parameshwara*. He had accepted Him as his *alter ego*.

It was difficult for him to ignore his *Istadeva, Shiva Paramatman* and sing of Rama alone. So throughout the *Manasa* whenever he found an opportunity to sing of the glories of *Shiva Mahadeva* he never missed it. So much so that he had gone out of the way at times and insert the glories of Shiva in different narratives. The famed episode of the *Kaaka Bhushandi Katha,* which does not occur in the original Valmiki, is a bright and convincing example of his devotional loyalty to Shiva.

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Let us recall the famous Purana-incident of Shiva's issue against the aristocratic exclusiveness of the arch snob and proud Aryan patriarch *Daksha-Prajapati,* and the subsequent destruction of Deva-sacrifice, as well as the humiliation of the Devas, the Brahmanas, the Vedas and also of the very Agni which the Aryans so much adored.

Let us recall that famous and significant incident step by step in all its aspects.

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The patriarch Daksha's sacrifice was really a drama specially arranged for a showdown with 'the brute uncultured' Shiva, who, as Daksha thought, had lured his favourite daughter Satee into a marriage tie with him, thus reducing his status amongst the Devas.

So he had arranged this elaborate sacrifice with a fanfare worthy of the leader of the Aryans. And Shiva as well as Satee had been studiously and deliberately omitted from the sacrificial invitations.

This was a ploy on the part of the intriguing leader of the Devas, Daksha, to humiliate Shiva. Satee protested in spite of serious objections from Shiva, who beseeched her to calm down. She did not listen and wanted to avenge this open insult to her chosen husband.

In the process, as she attended the sacrificial gathering, uninvited, she was subjected to an open banter amidst the invited celestial guests. She caused by her uninvited presence a terrible confusion, the upshot of which was the total destruction of the entire sacrificial fanfare. The Devas had to beat an ignominious quick retreat from the terrible destruction that ensued, because the insults poured on the absent Shiva had made Satee take her own life in remorse, by jumping into the sacrificial fire.

The Gana guards of Satee, taken aback by the quick unexpected turn of events, got infuriated beyond control, and brought down total destruction to the celebrations of the sacrifice. Hell was let loose, and a pandemonium prevailed.

The showdown permanently had put the Deva community in its place. The supremacy of Shiva and of the Shiva followers was established for good. To this day all Hindu sacrifices and rites offer their 'first' prayers to Ganesha, and Rudra with a view to mollify the temper of Shiva and his hordes. Ganesha was the leader of the Shiva hordes; and Rudra was none else but a terrible all-destroying form of Shiva himself.

Thus, although he had opted out to write about the various harassments and final victory of Shree Rama of Ayodhya, because the theme in itself recalled so many incidents of his own life, and the suffering he had to go through, in fact, he had remained a close servant and devotee of Shiva. The unconventional ways of the life and habits of Shiva, his preferences for living in the open with all and sundry with a wreckless disregard for all forms, enchanted him.

Besides, the Shaivic philosophy of *Vedaanta* and *Samkhya* captivated his spiritual identity. Shiva blessed him with a philosophy of living and loving, and Rama gave him an objective ideal to follow and propagate that universal love, as well as respect for pledged words.

In this way Tulsidas was inspired and determined to write a book unique in its construction, composition, content and metaphysical import. Besides the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, the two classic epics, there is no other composition in any of the Indian languages which captures the heartbeat of the Indian mind so vividly and livingly as the great and only *Ramacharita-Manasa*.

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The new Ramayana *Ramcharita-Manasa* continued to be written, but not without serious challenges from the frustrated Brahmanical oppositions. The oppositions took very serious forms, which threatened his life several times. Living in Varanasi became a hazardous risk.

The forces of opposition were busy. They would not stop from preventing the Ramayana to be written. Serious conspiracies were laid to burn and destroy the odd non-conventional, non-Brahmanical, non-Sanskrit rustic sacrilegious manuscript. But Tulsidas stood his ground; and with the blessings of Raghupati Rama he succeeded in baffling all intrigues, and completing the great work.

It must be noted here that to the credit of the smoothness of his temper and the exclusive divinity of his soul he bore no malice, not even a trace of it, against the people who harassed him so much, and even had manhandled him, forcing him to abandon Kashi, and live in seclusion, so that hiding in Shankatamochana he had to complete his life work.

Nowhere in his epic do we find any trace of either malice or anger against a community or against an individual. His noble and great philosophical mind rode over all the petty intrigues, and bore his attention to nothing else but the holiness which the name of Rama created in his soul.

His memorable and noble epic, as we read it, is replete with his humblest humility, his noblest sentiments for the greatness and sublimity of the Brahmins as a class, and he regarded the services offered to this select class of people a privilege and a duty. His nobility was such and so full that malice did not find any place in it.

Again and again throughout his epic he has warned men to bring their homage to the Brahmins to whom we owe the *Vedas*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, the great *Puranas*, and the entire gambit of the Darshanas and the ritualistic literature. Astronomy, science, medicine, lexicons, grammar and prosody, name it, the whole of the intellectual wealth of early mankind was gifted by the genius of this single class. It would be a sin not to pay total homage to the memory of this class.

He worshipped the Brahmanas, and advised all to hold them in the deepest respect.

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Ramacharita-Manasa (1574-77) was not the only book he had kept himself busy with. In the meanwhile he had written a number of other books, which having come to the knowledge of the people had established his fame already as the premier poet in Hindi literature (*Geetavali* in 1571; *Kavitavali* and *Barvai Ramayana* in 1612; *Vinaya Patrika* came soon after). In spite of the localized Brahmanical opposition Tulsi's work had been going in full force; and his fame grew.

Northern India was filled with the fame and piety of this saintly poet. The name of Tulsidas was lauded all over the land. His Ramayana became so famous that it was read by all and sundry. No opposition could check its intrinsic merit. It beame a pillar of strength to the sustenance of Hinduism in a land where the Islamic government was keen on converting people, mainly those who found themselves harassed and humiliated by the tyranny of the caste system.

To escape that humiliation, and to escape the hardship of ferocious economic disparity, particularly to seek petty privileges in the Islamic Government many from the 'lower' humiliated miserable castes embraced Islam.

It is sad to note here that the guardians of the *dharma* could not have cared less. At least it appeared to be so. The restrictions grew more and more rigid at this stage. A confrontation adopted a very mistaken path. The strategy had failed totally.

In fact they tried to fight the inroads of conversion by a protecting, shying and reservist approach, which failed miserably.

At this juncture the approach and propagation of Love and Equality, as the Sufists preached, could have brought the majority community a very paying dividend. But diehardism as a sad policy is ingrained in conservatives, which followed and stuck to the suicidal course of Shastrik rigidity.

Because of the devotional intensity ingrained into the new message contained in the *Ramcharita-Manasa* the tide of conversion was halted, and the Hindu society adhered to the principle of holding on to their ancestral religious principles, without being bothered about the sufferings they had to face. *Ramcharita-Manasa* taught them the lesson that there is always a dignity in silent suffering in the name of Truth and Love, piety and dutifulness. Like a lotus blooming from out of mud and muck, God consciousness blooms from silent fortitude and abject tolerance.

So great and irresistible was that influence of the message of brotherhood and equality, of the absence of restrictive social laws, that even the erstwhile converts, and even the members of genuine Islam fell for the Love message of brotherhood and submission (*prapatti*) as contained in the *Ramcharita-Manasa*.

All however, did not see the advantage in adopting the new message to the larger cause of Hinduism, and to the country and its social order of the times.

The diehards persisted to be grumbling still against Tulsidas for continuing with composing his Ramayana. The professional Brahmin orthodoxy of the time were too quick to see that in future the mass would themselves read the Ramayana directly, and would not wait for the God appointed Brahmin experts to read the Sanskrit version, and explain the same to them in their respective dialect. The loss of that right was a loss in money and power, as well as a loss of the stern hold over the society.

Such a situation had a deep economic bearing which bothered them. The writing of the *Manasa* was indeed a threat to their agelong privileges. They would not permit this to happen. Tulsi's opposition now took in threatening form.

The upshot of all these confusions was an attempt to burn the meager abode of Tulsidas in Varanasi, and even chastise and manhandle him personally. As a result of this he had left main Varanasi (Tulsi-ghat) precipitately in a dashing but secret march, and took shelter outside the city's southern outskirts just beyond the border lines of the small rivulet Asi.

The woods in those far off days (400 years back) was deep, lonely and infested with various animals, particularly with monkeys. But this very uninhabitable condition afforded him a desirable cover. He took shelter in it, and completed there his famous epic *Ramcharita-Manasa*.

His name became a household word. He was hailed as the greatest poet of his time. Because that sheltered wood beyond the Asi river had provided him with a safe habitat, he christened the quiet wood as *Shankata-Mochana*, the Divine Protection from all dangers and threats.

Today *Shankata-Mochana* has been turned into a popular pilgrimage, a decorated 'tourist spot'. Millions visit the place and pay homage to the memories of Goswami Tulsidas, the composer of the great legend of Rama in a popular language.

The narrative was highly sweet sonorous versified version of a quite different texture, very suitable to the rustics and the unassumed, because of the raciness of the narration in a very familiar language which was adored by the mass and sundry. Even the recently converted ones, although Islamic, fell for the charms of the writing, for converted or not, the charms of the *Rama-katha* sent waves of echoes in their ancestral blood, and made them read it with avidity and glee.

The contribution of *Ramcharita-Manasa* to the cultural life of India has been immense. Ever since this epic has remained the binding force within the entire Hindi belt of India and the movement of divining God through the spirit of Love and Love alone became very popular.

A nation's prospects depend largely on a dominant feeling of unity and solidarity. Divisive mental reservations like acid in a metal body gradually disintegrates solidarity, without which no nation, no national interest could develop or subsist.

Although the menace and tyranny of a foreign government which felt no interest in the local ideals, and which was thoughtlessly adamant in humiliating and reducing to pieces its time honoured institutions, the soul of India was bidding time like Sita, to be rescued.

Tulsi's book afforded them the break. They regained their senses of dignity, unity, solidarity, invincibility; but above all their faith in the goodness of Man. The essence of *Ramcharita-Manasa* pervaded all historical miseries of the nation, and through the elevation of the confidence, courage, status of the 'common man' the National Prestige of India gained in subjective and abstract faiths. The Indian Mind felt for the first time after *Ashoka the Great* to be one and invincible. A nation was reborn. *Ramcharita-Manasa* has acted on Indian history as a *Sanjeevani-Sudha*—a tonic for Resurrection of the Soul.

Ever since the Sufi-s the idea of finding God as an equal, as a beloved and a friend, and a further idea of getting united with the same God, and object of Love, and even merging totally into His personality became very popular. The basic idea was of FANA, a Persian word which means total annihilation into the ideals of emotional climax. It obliterates ego, and bring a union of Spirit.

Tulsidas stands today as a stalwart in the ranks of saintly of India who had submitted his body and soul to the Love for Raghupati Rama. With Love he got up in the morning, and with Love he went to sleep at the day. Even in his sleep and dreams he was dedicated to Raghupati.

The message of Love that he had helped to spread throughout the length and breadth of the Indian sub-continent made his name a byword; and the immense importance of that name sticks to the godly soul even today. Kalidas, Shakespeare and Tagore are reserved for a class; but Tulsidas and his *Ramcharita-Manasa* is a treasure for the mass, for all.

Total dedication to the Godhead, total annihilation and merging in the identity of God became the final goal of all worship. In thought, action and meditation men and women sought union of the '*terra-Self*' with the '*prima-Self*', the union of the *Jeevatman* and the *Paramatman*; the union of *Shri Raadha* with *Shree Krishna*.

Such a wilful complete effacement of identification became the cherished goal of a true devotee. It was enthusiastic longing of a different character. And the whole country was carried away by the idea.

Bhakti became the soul and the substance of this kind of religious movement.

Smaranam Keertanam Vishnoh Vandanam Paada
Sevanam
Archanam Sevanam Daasyam Saukhyam
Atmanivedanam

"To think of God, sing of Him, bow to Him, wash His feet, and worship Him and attend to Him constantly as a servant, and finally to gain His friendship and comradry before a total Union"—became the goal of these divinely inspired devotees. They were called the *Vaishnavas,* the followers of *Vishnu*, the final Godhead, the Brahman, a Power that subsists in all forms and ideas (✓ VIS=inlaid into).

And Tulsidas, his Ramayana, added to the story of life of Meera, Chaitanya, Guru Ramananda and Kabir with the songs of Meera, Kabir and Surdas fed the burning enthusiasm of the contemporary devotees of the land to a flaming height.

It is no easy a task to bind together a motley of population of an entire sub-continent resided by so many sects and filled with so many ideas into one single devotional unit only through the forces of music and a metrical composition.

But the sublime sufi brotherhood of India by the time of Tulsidas had grown into a multitude. The songs of Kabir, Nanak, Namdev, Narsi, Purandar, Jnaan-dev, Surdas and Mirabai had been doing their rounds all over the world of devotees. In market-places and caravansarais of famed pilgrim centers even the songs of Rumi, Hafiz, Omar Khayyam, Baba Farid, and Bullah Shah could be heard.

The Love adoration of the saints of the famed *Pushti Marga*—Ramanuja, Madhva, Nimbarka and Ballabha, had swept over the country. Men everywhere eagerly assembled to hear of God, and God's Love for the ardent dedicated devotee. The Vaishnava songs of Vidyapati, Jayadev, Chandidas and Jnanadasa were being sung in all villages. The spread of Sufi devotion and dedication mixed with the Vaishnava singings from the Bhagavatam and the Geeta

Govindam made the mass seek in their own lives the ethereal bliss of the devotion of Raadha, of Meera Bai. They too wanted to live and die as many other devotees had lived and died for the Love of Shree Krishna.

The thoughtless oppressive measures of the misguided governance of the Moghul Emperor Aurangzeb had been taking a toll of the saints who attempted to preach their music and songs. In spite of all oppositions of the bigoted monarch the songs prevailed. The rock bed of India's faith in Man and Love was not even touched by the passing whims of a misguided monarch who had failed to read the pulse of the nation he presumed to govern.

What we know of India today as Vaishnavism owes a great deal to these stalwarts who had kept up the zeal for singing of God despite all the threats and oppressions of the temporal tyrants.

Tulsi's fame spread; and with that his tired bones sought a final rest. Before he died he had the good fortune of receiving homages from the leading scholars of the time, who appreciated fully Tulsi's hold on the Vedaanta, and Tulsi's devotional attachment to Rama.

It was through the blessing of Bhakti and Bhakti alone, through the powers of *prapatti* and *sharanagati* (submission and obeisance) that he succeeded in attaining so monumental and immortal an achievement as the world renowned musical epic narration of the legend of Rama, and by singing of Rama alone attained what all yogis dream to achieve—*Prajna* in *Poorna Nirvialpa Samadhi.*

Tulsidas united with his beloved Rama on the banks of the Ganges at Varanasi on Shravana Krishna Tritiya of 1623.

Such saintly souls do not have to die like the common mortals. We die; the Tulsi-s of sainthood do not. From the mortal world they enter the immortal elysium, and gain eternal bliss. They just decide to pass away. Leaving the mortal frame of flesh and bones they willingly and under the enlightenment of their full consciousness step over the little stream of Life to the shores of Blissful Eternity, where all souls have their destined abode, and where the spirit of Shree Ramachandra of Ayodhya eternally rules with His devotee Hanuman guarding over as usual.

August 15, 1997

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Appendix

ACHARYA ABHINAVAGUPTA'S EXPOSITION OF *RASA* AND *BHAAVA*

Rasa* and *Bhaava

In speaking about *Bhakti* and Divine Love, the word *Rasa* has been used again and again. Yet this untranslatable word has not been fully defined, or even identified in any of the ancient Sanskrit texts, although most of them have been using it.

It is not true to say that the ancients did not know about *Rasa*, or they did not use the word. They did. In the *Rig Veda* itself the word has been used no less than 52 times. But the word has been systematically used in a purely objective sense, having nothing to do with its subjective, and in a sense, greater import.

The ancients used *Rasa* in a purely physical sense. It meant the sense-reactions of whatever was transferred to the system through the physical limb, the tongue, significantly known as *Rasana*, because the faculty of tasting is inherent in that limb. In tasting as a faculty there exists also a sensitiveness about acceptance or rejection. These constitute a naturally built-in safety-syndrome for acceptance, or rejection of objects, generally suitable or unsuitable for the maintenance of good health. Taste, or *Rasa* in this sense, is a naturally gifted protective mechanism for the preservation of life.

Preservation cannot be the only aim for the human life. Man needs more than mere preservation. A healthy life preserved safely calls for that essential tonic known as *interest* which alone adds to a will to live. Life without interest is a life without a desire to live. This type of blankness about interest acts contrary to Nature's plan. Nature creates; and Nature wants that life should also create.

It is through the faculty of creativeness that the Life-force attains grades of inferior or superior life. It is in this sense that Man is called the greatest achievement of Nature, when an amoeba is the lowest.

It is the inbuilt subjectivity of sense perceptions of man which confers on him the glorious opportunity for creating beauty and spreading love. The only animal that entertains dreams to create things of beauty is Man. For him *Rasa* must mean more than a mere physical reaction. The use of the word *Rasa* in the *Vedas* in the sense of taste alone completely ignores this essential demand of human life.

It took centuries for the word *Rasa* to assume a new meaning, and a so-far-undiscovered new dimension to the special subjective faculty of man to create, to enjoy his own creation, and creative expressions of his fellow men, and to share that enjoyment. The genius of a spiritual thinker, merged in the mysteries of life, and at the same time in the mysteries of creativeness of human life, the magic of unfolding a new world of joy and inspiration put forward this new connotation to the word *Rasa*.

This man, who for the first time used *Rasa* in this new subjective sense, was **Acharya Abhinavagupta** of Kashmir (c. 960 A.D.), one of the front rank luminaries of the spiritual intellect of India. He for the first time added a spiritual dimension to the old Vedic word *Rasa*. He gave a subjective dimension to a word used only in the sense of its objective change on taste felt through the tongue.

Taste as a faculty of the tongue also acts as a sentinel for protecting health. It accepts what is congenial, and rejects what is not. While this is partially true of taste to a degree, subjectively speaking the word taste assumes a completely different dimension under his magic touch.

It was Abhinava who for the first time also hit upon the supreme truth about human appreciation of things of art. He asserted as a master analytical soul that a negative attitude to the spiritual is sheer wastage of Life and its Mission. For a purposeful fulfilment of that mission the soul and the body of Man has got to get involved with the world around, and feel the vibrating symphonic throb that imperceptibly binds the personal inner soul, the individual soul, with the world of the cosmos. Being a great *Tantra-Sadhaka* he found this novel way of spiritual realization both realistic and subjective.

It was he who had visualized the existence of tiaras of universes operating with a rhythmic precision as a part of the creation-phenomenon. He himself in his rigidly conducted yogic life experienced the gifts of Nature and Natural faculties of man for absorbing all those expressions in Nature and cosmos which contribute to the aesthetic sensitivity of man. He, the great Tantrik, came to know that things of beauty and art have an impact on the indomitable human spirit.

For him *Rasa* was the indefinable elixir that works as a sap that binds the individual soul with the universal soul.

This brings the spiritual borders of consciousness quite close to the emotional; and *yogi* as he was, Abhinava was not closed to the emotional personality in the common man. This is the reason how he found himself compelled to study deeply the question of a novel implication in the study of *Rasa*, and how that implication affected the aesthetic sensibilities of man. In other words, Abhinava wanted to find and establish a hitherto unattended link between appreciation of a thing of beauty, and a far deeper contribution to the yogic aspirations of man, viz. peace reigning over the turbulence of creative urge.

In the context of emotional reactions and spiritual effects in which *Rasa* has been used in relation to *Bhakti*, and to its gradual growth, it refers to a special kind of reaction, which, not the tongue or any other organ of the body could register. The only centre of its reaction has to be 'spiritual', entirely contemplative, subjective. It is so because *Rasa* is a reactive appreciation which mind alone decides to accept or reject. It refers to the Inner Man, who perceives all the outward world phenomenon without having to use the various conventional physical organs, eyes, skin, ears, tongue, etc.

The appreciation of *Rasa*, thus, depends on no organs specifically, yet it does involve the entire perceptive and conceptive systems reacting on an abstract, spiritually alert, inner personality, or *Antahkarana*, the inner-self.

In this way the use of the word *Rasa* used in the discipline of Aryan Poetics differs fundamentally from the word *Rasa* as used in the ancient classics.

The difference does not stop here. *Rasa* as a means of aesthetic appreciation is entirely dependent on a process—on a kind of chain reaction started by the unexpected event of appreciating a thing of beauty; and this faculty of appreciation of beauty, in the first instance, is a naturally inspired and pleasantly exciting aptitude. Such an appreciation involves the entire personality of Man, and does not stop at this or that sensuous delight of this or that sense organ. The change is neither temporary nor superficial. Indeed the change is so fundamental, so deeply stirring, that the personality and character of an individual undergoes radical transformations under the soothing influence of the dawn of *Rasa* on a field of supra-human consciousness, already referred to as *Antahkarana*. (*Antah* = inner, sub-strata; *Karana* = process of activity; that which carries on its activities within the deeper chambers of the mind).

The process of acceptance and absorption of the sensitive messages, and their gradual transformation into the character and personality of a human being must have to pass through some device of assimilation and change. Within the dynamics of the perceptivity of a human being there must exist a point of selection, rejection, acceptance and assimilation, and this refers to the subtle system of *Antahkarana*, which is one of the most valued gifts of the ancient Aryan metaphysicians to posterity.

Antahkarana could change, influence and mould the nature and character of a person by its own dictates. The influence that Antahkarana holds on the formation of an individual's character and activities, inclusive of thinking, is far-reaching, as well as abiding.

It is *Antahkarana* alone which records all external and internal perceptions, as well as their chained reactions so inescapably and permanently that under its influence and guidance an individual's personal emotional character and behaviour undergoes radical changes. A study of deeper psychology depends on a study of *Antahkarana*. It is what the "black box" in a plane is. It records all, guides all, conserves all. It is most dependable in a crisis.

Antahkarana is thus the supreme Law-maker in guiding the destiny of a person. It acts as the Law-Maker, the advocate, the judge and the hangman all rolled into one. Attempts to simplify its influence by calling it Conscience, Inner-voice, etc., fail to hit the mark. The unique concept of *Antahkarana* is an Aryan contribution to the world of the study of the mind and its perceptual complexities. While *Kulakundalini* sparks consciousness into motion, *Antahkarana* records the emotional reactions of Man's deeper self.

The actual voluptuous enjoyment of any novel sensitive reaction, which *Antahkarana* first registers, creates a change in emotional personality. An individual is moved or unmoved by a new sight, or sound, or taste, or any other confrontation, which affects his mood, and changes it from one state to a newer one. This voluptuous change overwhelms the mind of man due to the upsurge of a new sensation, known as *Rasa*. A sensitive man seeks the enjoyment of *Rasa*; and out of this inlaid desire is produced art, literature, music, dance, drama, etc.

And from this enjoyment, this new excitement and thrill, i.e., *spanda*, a field of *Rasa* spreads out and overwhelms the *Antahkarana*, which gradually passes into a new mood, which he luxuriates in. The mood into which *Antahkarana* now passes is so pleasant, so rapturous that he hates to part with it. He is merged in the special mood or *bhaava* that throws him into a tranquil, but transcendental joy. It becomes a part of him; and he becomes a part of this joy. He enters into a special condition known as *Bhaava*, spiritual mood, or trance. It transports transcendence to a subjective elevated grade where all is joy and light, and where there is no sorrow for unfulfilment. In yogic parlance this state is *Bhaava-Samadhi*.

This new change is not chance-gifted. In fact, it is the gift of keen concentration on an aesthetic subject of entirely spiritual import. The mechanics of this new elevation in spirit, this new mood, otherwise known as *Bhaava-Samadhi*, are complex and abstract; but with attentive interest, the workings of this mechanism could be followed.

Antahkarana, as we had pointed out, under the influence of *Rasa* initially enjoys a novel situation. A new chemistry brings about a series of chained changes for which his mind is not fully prepared. Wordsworth refers to this novelty as "a gentle shock of mild surprise", since the reaction is extremely pleasant.

A new landscape, an unexpected spectacle, or a breath-bracing scenery, an absorbing play, a piece of poetry, a thing of art and beauty, the company of a friend, even a screaming shock of fear, or a crisis of shattered expectations, etc. is capable of bringing about a big change in the mood of an individual all of a sudden.

The change is emotional, and the affected person invariably reacts to it either in sheer glee, or in gloomy sadness; either positively, or negatively. Either way, react he must. And this appreciable reaction brings about a change in the mind of an individual. He is deeply affected. He is *stirred* within. He gets merged in a change of mood. Within his personality the spring of *Rasa* has turned into a novel mood, a *Bhaava; a something that keeps his inner soul perpetually engaged in a state of steady merging ecstasy.* (*Atmanam Paramatmani Samyojya*, as Tantra would say).

This is known as *transcendental liberation*, which in fact is a kind of perpetual identification with the Great Beyond, when the Self is recognized as an indivisible portion of the Super-mind, the Supra-Conscious identification of the true Self, about which we care so little.

This sublime change of mood holds an important part in the life of Man in achieving what all men seek, a heartful drink of Supreme Transcendental Joy. Meditation seeks this joy after getting involved in (now much commercialized) the Yoga syndrome.

And this is called *Bhaava*, a novel change of mood, which gradually sinks the half-bemused Self into what has been defined as *Rasa*. The rapturous dimensions of the perfect consummation of *Rasa* lead to a state of transcendental equipoise, also known as *Samadhi*. The three stages of *Sadhana, Samadhi* and *Siddhi* are thus achieved through this much simpler way of *Sphota, Spanda*, *Rasa* and *Bhaava*, induced by a pure spiritual exhilaration of spirit induced by watching moving things of art and beauty.

Rasa as a word has occurred no less that 52 times in the Vedas *(Soma indriya Rasah-VIII.3.20)*. In this verse *Rasa* has been mentioned definitely as an inebriating drink, an elixir of life which inspires joy, thrill (passion), exhilaration; but which also indicates 'power that bestows Amrita', i.e., victory over death. It secures, in other words, fearlessness, negating the power of death. Such a spiritual victory over the fear of death suggests, of course, a kind of 'inner enlightenment', which was supposed to be the ultimate goal of all spiritual seekers (*Rk Veda*-IX.113. 5-6-7).

When we were about to give up the enquiry for the specialized use of the word *Rasa* as we find its use in the context of *Bhakti* and Love, and as we have been using it throughout much in the same sense as the *Rasacharyas* (Masters of the distinct emotions of Love and submission in a Divine concept) had been doing in their writings, we suddenly came across with a 'commentary' on an ancient book by *Rishi* Bharata known as the *Natya Shastram*, or *Natya Sutram*.

The book generally deals with the kind of art forms, but particularly with art of writing and presentation of a dramatic creation. Apart from the involved poetics of creation of a play, it also deals with, in detail, the objective skills of direction, presentation, stage requirements, audience accommodation, make-up and even publicity. It is thus one of the most complete authentic and popular books on Poetics in Sanskrit.

Its popularity is evidenced by the fact that the treatise had undergone popular changes, and a variety of recensions between the years BC 400, and 800 AD This in itself stands as a clear proof of the interest the ancient Indian society was used to take in histrionic arts and advanced literature. Even today it could be regarded as a very complete book on the subject, and its fame has been lauded by such literary savants as *Vararuchi, Ghatakarpara, Bhavabhuti, Kalidasa,* etc.

But the only commentary available on this very popular book has been, surprisingly, written by the great Kashmir scholar Abhinavagupta, a famed Tantra scholar of the day

(960 AD). It is in this commentary, for the first time, we come across with the word *Rasa* as a specialized topic in the elaborate discussions on Poetics and Aesthetics.

Rasa was no longer confined to mere viscosity and taste. It was more than an appeal to the tongue alone. *Rasa* appealed to the subtle subjectivity of aesthetics. It became a highly noted factor in Poetics.

Abhinava's treatment of Poetics in general, and of *Rasa*, and of Play-writing and Play-presentation in particular has been considered unique in the Indian classical treatment of histrionic arts. *Abhinava* considers that the primary consideration of a dramatic representation, as different from a simple narrative one, is to reach a point, a climax as it were, of emotional conflict. He considers that a given standard reaction must evoke a corresponding emotive response in the deeper feelings of man.

In short, this is *Bhaava*, the treasured mood that springs from the enjoyment of *Rasa*. *Bhaava* stirs man's enjoyment of *Rasa*, and leads to a sublimation of mood and elevates the personality of man in sublimated regions, where he is free to experience the subtlest of feelings which meditation alone is supposed to confer on human consciousness.

In short, *Bhaava* is an evolute of *Rasa*. and keeps the human personality merged in thrill due to the impact of an exhilarating experience of *Rasa*. As such the savants who know, consider *Bhaava* to be regarded as that precious mood about which poets sang wholeheartedly:

And I have felt,
A presence that disturbs me with joy of elevated
thoughts;
A sense sublime of something far more deeply
interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,

And the blue sky, and in the kind of man:
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things...

—Wordsworth

For *Rasa* to reach its subtlest limit this nexus between emotional action and reaction is natural, and normally expected. It acts as a pleasant reflex. In fact, the subtler the sensitiveness in a person, the more the agitation which a conflict in emotional levels could usually provoke.

It is expected and natural that a father would bear special valued sentiments for the welfare of his children. If a father has taken all necessary steps, and bestowed all necessary care for the promotion of the interests of his children, he would expect his plans to lead to a final success. This of course would be regarded as a straight course for things to happen.

But often this is not the case. Opposite reactions appear, and disturb. Strange and unexpected circumstances and events present obstructions to a smooth carriage of the course, and the disturbed father has to watch his beleaguered children facing unmitigable distress. His beloveds, he watches, face calamities for which he finds no redress (*Electra* by Euripides).

A classic example of this conflicting of interests and events is found in the great epic the *Mahabharata*, where the course of events force the wise father into the mystery of Life. In such dramatic (unexpected?) changes the outside watchers find their moods and qualms, expectations and frustrations reflected. The unexpected creates the drama; the drama creates *Rasa*; and *Rasa* leads to the consummation of a state of *Bhaava*, which is the final aim of all creations in art, enterprise and *Sadhana* that has to lead to *Siddhi*, which is the final state of spiritual success.

It is for the first time that *Abhinavagupta* analyses this situation, and correctly evaluates the place of *Rasa* and *Bhaava* in the formation within the human psyche, of a field of joy through the appreciation of Art. It was he who rightly allocated the values of shock-surprises, thrill and the ecstatic subjectivity of sheer joy, and its hold on rapturous realization of the elevated Self within the bounds of abstracted *Anandam*, which is technically exalted as *Samadhi*.

The history of enunciation of the principles of *Rasa* as laid out by the *Rasa* scholars of India runs back to BC 400. At that early age those rhetoricians had come to the conclusion that through laughter or tears, the human mind is kept agitated equally by a change of events, or situations. In their records we come across with a telling sentence: *Vibhaavaanubhava vyabhichari samyogat Rasa nishpattih* [*Rasa* is a reactive corollary issuing from a conflict of positive and negative moods (Flatness of mood does not create *Rasa*)], says Lollata Bhatta, another *Rasa* scholar of the time.

Yet another front-line scholar in Classical Poetics, *Dandi*, has spoken very highly of Abhinava's analysis of *Rasa*, *Dhvani* (resonance or words used for conveying an idea) and the dramatic reactions arising out of the conflict of *Bhava prakshepa*, i.e., conflicts arising out of emotional reactions and counter-reactions.

"*Suffice it to say that with perhaps the only exception of Mahima Bhatta, who was probably Abhinava's younger contemporary, and who in his Vyakti Viveka, tried to explode the theory of Dhvani, all the writers on Poetics who came 'after' Abhinava (Mammata in the 'Kavyaprakasha', Hemachandra in his 'Kayavanushasana', Vishvanatha in his 'Saahitya-darpana', Shaarada-tanaya in his 'Bhaava-prakasha', Appaya Dikshit in his 'Kuvalayananda,' Jagannatha in his 'Rasa-gangadhar' and the famous treatise of 'Kaavya-pradeepa') refer to or follow Abhinava's theory of Rasa, Bhaava and Dhvani;*

most of them extensively quote him, and 'Sangeeta-ratnakara and Shringara-ratnakara' are more or less simple versifications of parts of Abhinava's commentary on Bharata's Natya-Sutra" (ABHINAVAGUPTA...Dr. K.C. Pandey: The Chaukhamba Sanskrit Series Office, Varanasi, p. 270).

At that remote point of time (from Bharata to Abhinava—BC 800–362 AD) the popularity of the novel approach to the changes in mood in art-forms as explained and enunciated by Abhinava used to be regarded as a unique achievement. The singular penetrative analysis of the new approach had made the *Natyasutra* of Bharata (BC 800) so popular that the original book, as we have noted, had undergone many changes, recensions and even additions (362 AD) proving thereby both the urgency and ingenuity of a popular subject.

What we use today as the Commentary is a volume of 6000 verses, most of which deals with Man's preoccupations with subjective entertainment of the soul, which in its turn is supposed to arouse and elevate the finer spirit of the human feelings. According to Abhinava, man's spiritual aspirations are more than satisfied by the human faculty of appreciation of the ethos of aesthetics.

The acumen of a culture and its civilized form is adjudged by the way a special culture has decided upon the way and method of how to treasure and utilize its free time, i.e., the time which is not occupied with the worries and strains of the direct problems of earning bread and butter. Economic responsibilities of Life imply work for a living, a growth; but since man cannot work for all the time, man has to find times of rest; and the way a man, a culture organizes a refined use for the utilization of that resting time marks the grade of culture which his society has achieved. If you want to know a man, know his hobbies.

A culture is adjudged by its benevolent expansiveness, and lasting endurance of its values, which are picked up and adopted by other cultures. As such the forms of the art-exposes a people invent, organize, espouse and cultivate indicate the excellence of the grading of their culture, as well as the finer texture of subjectivity of their mind.

As such all types of art-forms not only express the subjectivity of a people's inmost Soul, the refinement of an individual Soul, but they also reflect a people's care for inner values which act as a sure guidance to the appreciation of a people's purity of motives, and achievement of ethical sanitation of ideas and forms, their contribution to the future course of history. Corrupt art forms corrupt and damage history. Dhritarashtra succumbs to the envious wiles and schemings of his spoilt son Duryodhana. This precipitates a tragedy which, in spite of all his wisdom and care, the blind King is too weak to avoid. He watches all his hopes crumble to pieces, and realizes that tragedies are destined to catch up with individuals in spite of the most careful precautions. Tragedies are parts of Life, and a strong man must keep himself ever and ever ready for it.

Hence the expected reactions to sweeter emotions clash with the unexpected. Or, the normal flow of events, for one reason or another, suddenly takes an unexpected turn, revealing a new scene, exposing a new truth, confronting a new situation, causing the soul 'a gentle shock of mild surprise', and this provokes new experiences, novel joy, special *ANANDAM* in an aesthetic sense. This is a situation created by a sudden effusion of *Rasa*, which leads to absorption of the *Rasa* so engendered, and helps the soul merge in *Bhaava*.

In this context one is reminded of such dramatic situations in literature as in the case of the clash between Achilles and Hector, or in the case of Rama deprived of his coronation just on the eve of the final event. In both the cases the course of events, though carefully laid out, takes a volte turn, giving rise to a new situation, and new flow of the unexpected. This creates a field of *Rasa*, which is the very core of the dramatic in life. This surge of *Rasa* sweeps even the most placid personality to get merged into a new *Bhava*, a new Mood.

This is materially crucial for drama. Such dramatic situations cover the progress of Life at every step. Such turn of events are materially and spiritually crucial for the education of the soul; this also proves ultimately a tremendous eye-opening education for the involved audience, this kind of a gripping sense of change of events.

Drama is in essence churned out of opposing events, of the unexpected, of the fluid situations, which life has to meet at every step.

Corrupt art forms corrupt and damage history. We respect the Egyptians, the Greeks even in this sickeningly belligerent and depraved period much more than the computerized North-American psyche, or the super-mechanized psyche of the clever Japs. This is due to the fact that we find the 'staying' and quiet art forms of these ancient cultures, which also excelled in the art of aggression and deference. The two World Wars have destroyed many lives and devastated many cities, World is groaning now under the weight of overpopulation. What has forever been destroyed beyond recovery are the values of the old world which gave us wondrous art forms which brought home to us messages of peace and harmony, which taught us the lessons of introspection and self-evaluation. The total loss of that kind of mental poise indeed has been a deplorable disaster, from which there appears to be no recovery. Spiritual progress once halted takes a very long time to recover.

A quiet reading of Bharata and Abhinava's commentary on the same, along with Abhinava's theories of *Pratyabhijnaa*, based on *Sphota, Spanda, Rasa* and *Bhava* automatically changes the mind of a modern "man in a hurry", and brings before him a hope for quieter life.

The *Rasa* theory of Abhinava appeals to the spirit of Man, and inspires him to attain the spring-head of living joy. The Lankan hero Ravana in the Ramayana at his deathbed had warned his compeers against erroneously increasing needs of life, and against sensuous demands which could never be satiated. Such warnings against the hope of securing a point of satiation had been sounded also by the wise Yayati. The desire for more possessions keeps soul stand like a beggar at Life's door, and it impoverishes the soul so much with a greeding hunger.

That there could be ways and means to divert personally motivated sensuous covetousness to universally motivated aesthetic satisfaction, and realise ecstatic liberation of the soul thereby, was first carefully enunciated by the great *Acharya* Abhinava in his celebrated theories of *TRIK (Sphota, Spanda and Pratyabhijnaa)* and as a corollary of the same, of his theories on what we are dealing with now, *Rasa, Bhava and Dhvani (taste, ecstasy and sonority).*

It is from him that we came to know for the first time that the enjoyment of aesthetics, particularly of *Rasa*, could neither be imposed, nor proved. Like the feeling and fascination of pure Love, it has to be 'felt' by the affected, and charmed individuals. It is only he or she who feels it, enjoys it even if a particular *Rasa* conveys tragedy, sadness, even bereavement.

Bhattanayake, a junior follower of Abhinava, has clearly stated *Raso na prateeyate, not-padyate, nabhivyanjate.* The consummation of *Rasa* cannot be imposed on another; neither can it be (forcibly) aroused; neither can it be impressed (by one on another). And the word *Prateeti* has been immediately explained as *Bhogikaranam,* i.e. relishing intensely, or making one relish.

The judgement of *Rasa* is as personal as listening to a song, or even more personally and intensely, to the sweet moan of a partner under the influence of libidinous union of two individuals. It is too personal, too deep-set to be expressed in words; in the technical words of Abhinava, in describing this inner exhilaration, this supreme consummation of an unique joy the stage of *Spanda* does not reach the stage of *Vaikhari (the thrill cannot find fitting expression).* Man has no language to express his deeper feelings without invariably finding language to be totally inadequate for such an intimate task. When he does, he is a lucky creator who has 'felt' his God. He attains a Divine Experience.

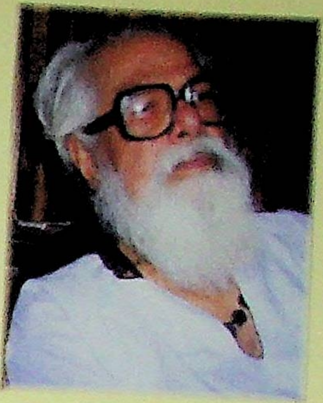
Hence the uses of such adornments to expressions as Figures of Speech, such as alliteration, onomatopoeia, etc., and other phonetic artistries, which fall within the consideration of *Dhvani*. Abhinava says clearly, *Kavyena bhavayate rasah* (The skills of expression help the subject entirely relishable); he further states, *Asvaadanaat-Aatmanubhavo Rasah kaavyataamuchyate* (the inner taste of literary excellence depends on the inner realization of the Self of what has been expressed through word); i.e. until the inner self of man realizes the beauty of an expression in the same mood as had been conveyed by the writer, the whole subject of literary expression has fallen flat without achieving what it had meant to achieve.

He authentically uses the word '*bhaavayante*'. For him the native effusion of an emotion, due to unexpected turn of events, or churning sequences, creates a change of mood, *Bhaava*, and that leads a man from one particular stage of perception to another surprising state. It is a different state altogether. It is a state when a deep consummation of some *Rasa* gradually creates a *Bhaava,* and in that *Bhaava* the *Antahkarana* delights in consumming as an emperor merged in his coveted degree of ecstasy.

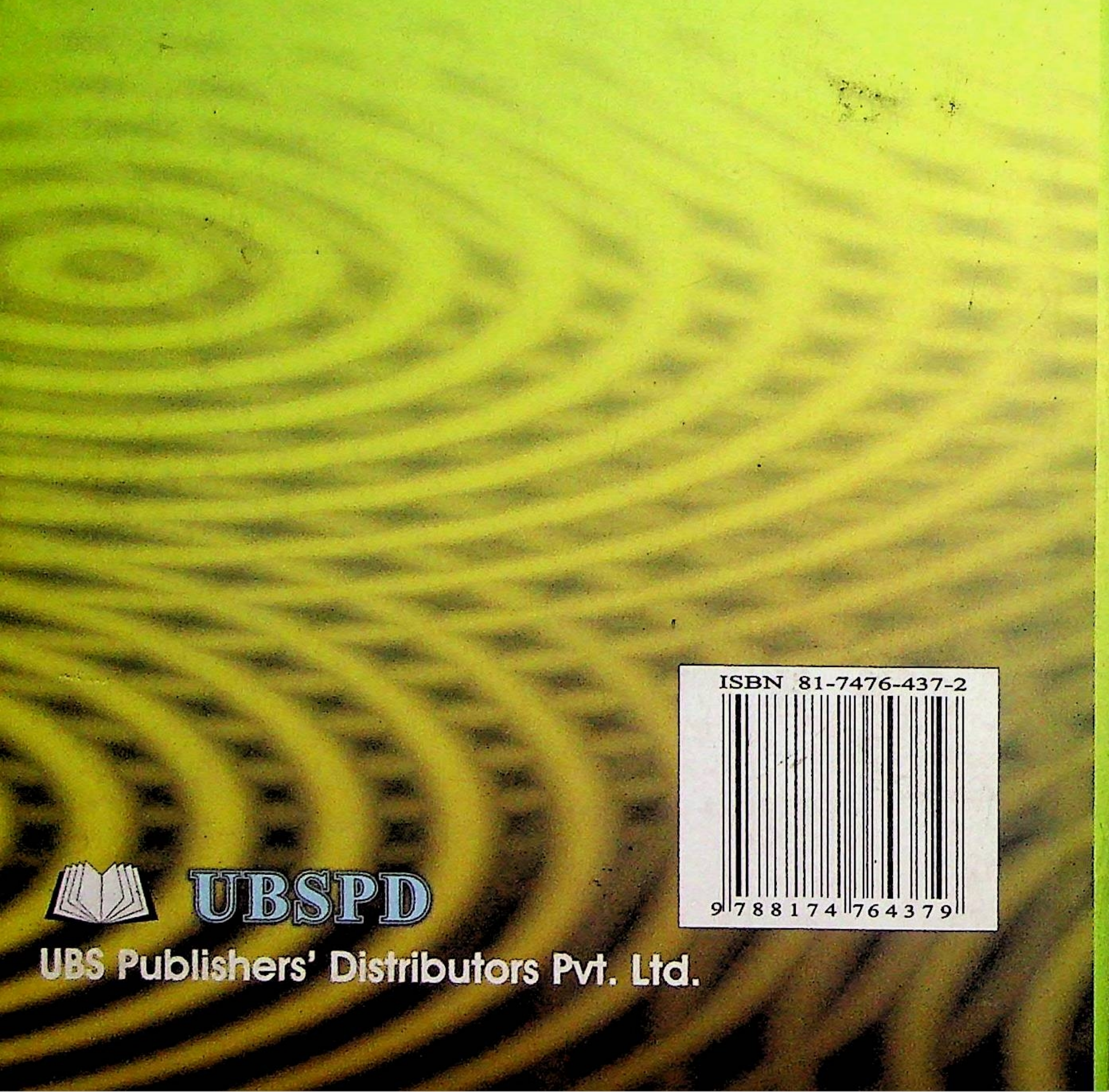
This is the pleasure that man seeks in art and literature, and about which Abhinavagupta, a great scholarly *Tantra Yogi* (like his contemporary Bhartrihari, the *Tantra* savant), speaks at length to prove that *Anandam* alone is the ultimate motive of all yogic enterprise; and this state of *Anandam* could be reached by Man through an honest exercise of the cultivation of Art and Literature as effectively as through the cultivation of the negative process of asceticism and self denial.

[There exists a subtle catch between the uses of the words *BHAAVA* and *RASA*; and it depends on a pun really. *Bhaava*, or *Bhavana* in Indian medical terms, also means extracting the essential ingredients of certain herbs, or salt by *steaming* it. To extract the essentials therefore also means to put an object under *Bhaava* or *Bhavana*. And, what has been extracted as essence is *Rasa. The involved pun has to be appreciated.*]

It is through this appeal to *Antahkarana*, and to the inner Soul, *Paramatman*, that *Rasa* has been equated with the *Brahman*, and an experience of *Bhaava* churning out *Rasa* and staying merged in it has been called *Rasopalabdhi*, or *Brahmopalabdhi.* And in this sense I believe *Rasa* and its consummation has been equated with Cosmic Realization. *Raso vai sah*, says the *Upanishad,* and of all the ancient Acharyas Abhinava alone took time, and used insight to illustrate conclusively how *Rasa* and *Divine Grace* in character fall into one family, one grade, and one unique achievement in life.



B. Bhattacharya, born in 1910 in Varanasi, received his initial education in traditional 'toles' (traditional learning centers) in Sanskrit and did M.A. (English) from Allahabad University. He has spent the best period of his life as an educationist in Guyana and Trinidad (West Indies). He still prides over his most precious institution—the Union Academy, New Delhi. At the ripe age of 93, in spite of his blindness, he still plans new books, and keeps a very lively and active group of scholars around him reminding of the famous academies run by Socrates, Coleridge and Arnold.



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